

have to use H-2A, irrespective of how inconvenient it is, irrespective of how bureaucratic it is, and irrespective of how expensive it is, if you want to be legal and if you want to have that quality pool of workers from which to choose.

By and large, farmers in my part of the world are now using H-2A, and they are finding that exactly what we thought would happen is happening. They do not have to look over their shoulder every year to see if ICE—now it is ICE—is coming in to check their workers. They know they are here legally. They know they are going to have to pay them a good wage. They know they are going to have to provide them with housing—all the things that H-2A provides. And they are willing to do that because they do have a quality pool from which to choose.

Now, finally, I point out that even though H-2A is not perfect—it is cumbersome, it is costly, it subjects employees who use it to lawsuits—in those areas where H-2A is used, they are not experiencing the shortage that others have found. So I think, rather than grant a large adjustment of status to illegal workers, we ought to sit down at the table and talk about ways we can make the H-2A program more workable for our farmers.

I am happy to sit down with my friends from California and Idaho and see if we cannot work through this. But let me say there are some fundamental problems with AgJOBS in addition to the adjustment of status provision, which does grant a pathway to becoming legal, a pathway to citizenship for those people who work in agriculture in this country under that program for a period of 2 years. We have to work through that. I do not think that is in the benefit of the American people, whether it is the American farmer or whether it is those people who are here legally trying to become citizens in the right way.

Secondly, there is an issue relative to the wage rate. Now we have the adverse effect wage rate under the H-2A program, which is not fair. It is not equitable to farmers in North Dakota versus farmers in Georgia, versus farmers in California and Idaho. In the recent immigration reform package we had on the floor, we sought to amend that bill to include what is known as a prevailing wage, “prevailing wage” being a wage that is determined by the Department of Labor to be applicable to agricultural workers in certain regions within a State, rather than in regions of the country. It is fair. It is equitable. We need to have that prevailing wage provision put into whatever amendment we make to the H-2A program.

Also, the AgJOBS bill does not eliminate what we call the 50-percent rule. Every farmer who uses H-2A knows and understands exactly what I am talking

about and knows what a hindrance this is to them because, under AgJOBS, they would be forced to hire what is called a blue card worker who is treated like a U.S. worker for hiring purposes. If he shows up at the farm before 50 percent of the work is complete, then even though the farmer has an H-2A worker here, he has to send that individual back to wherever he came from and hire that domestic person or that blue card person under the AgJOBS program.

It gets complicated, but those folks who have been involved in this know exactly what I am talking about. What we should make sure of is that at the end of the day we have a program that is fair to farmers, that is fair to Americans—whether they are folks who are here looking for work in agriculture or whether they are folks who are trying to become citizens of this country in a lawful way, in the way that is set forth in our Constitution—that we should make sure we provide our farmers with a quality pool of workers from which to choose, and that we make sure our farmers are required to pay those individuals a fair wage and are required to either provide them housing or provide them a housing allowance, so while they are here working on their farms we do not have to worry about where they are out in the communities, and that they are able to take care of themselves while they are here.

All of these issues are critically important parts of any immigration reform package we take up. So I simply urge again my friends who want to give these folks who come to work in agriculture a pathway to citizenship that we sit down at the table and work out these differences. Let's amend H-2A and accomplish the goal we all have in common.

Mr. President, I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from North Dakota is recognized for 30 minutes.

AGRICULTURE DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today on behalf of myself, Senator NELSON of Nebraska, Senator HAGEL, Senator DORGAN, Senator SALAZAR, Senator COLEMAN, Senator BAUCUS, Senator JOHNSON, Senator BURNS, Senator HARKIN, Senator CANTWELL, Senator CLINTON, Senator SCHUMER, Senator INOUE, Senator THUNE, Senator DURBIN, Senator OBAMA, Senator REID of Nevada, Senator DAYTON, Senator MURRAY, Senator JEFFORDS, and Senator ENZI.

Mr. President, 21 Senators, on a fully bipartisan basis, have cosponsored this legislation to provide disaster relief for our Nation's farmers.

In North Dakota, last year, we faced what was then extraordinary flooding. As shown here, these were pictures all

across eastern North Dakota. We had a million acres that were prevented from even being planted, hundreds of thousands of additional acres that were planted and then drowned out. There was no disaster assistance for those people.

This year—the irony of ironies—we have now had extraordinary drought. This is a picture from my home county, Burleigh County, in the center of North Dakota. This is a corn crop with absolutely nothing growing. This drought is now the third worst drought in our Nation's history.

This chart shows the U.S. drought monitor. It shows the severity of the drought across the entire midsection of the country. This shows, in the darkest colors, exceptional drought. You can see the exceptional areas of drought are these. North Dakota and South Dakota are the epicenter of this drought. It has been devastating. If assistance is not granted, thousands of farm families will be forced off the land. That is a fact.

I have had the independent bankers of my State say to the White House representative who was in my office: If assistance does not come, 5 to 10 percent of their clients in North Dakota will be forced out of business.

Thirty-four farm organizations—34 farm organizations—have now spoken and told the Congress of the United States: Take action on disaster assistance and take it now.

In addition, we have this letter from the State Commissioners of Agriculture from all across the country, saying that emergency agricultural disaster assistance is a high priority requiring action by Congress this year. It could not be more clear that assistance is needed, and it is needed now.

Last May, the Senate approved bipartisan emergency agricultural disaster assistance for the 2005 crop year. The President threatened to veto the bill if the farm assistance provisions were included. During the conference with the House, the majority leadership demanded the assistance provisions be removed.

In June, the Senate Appropriations Committee once again approved emergency disaster assistance as part of the agriculture appropriations bill for 2007. Again, the majority leadership has failed to bring that measure to the Senate floor for debate and vote.

Since that time, much of rural America has suffered from what USDA meteorologists have described as the third worst drought since records have been kept. Only the 1930s and 1950s exceed the severity of this drought.

In early September, I introduced a new bipartisan farm disaster relief bill to provide help for both 2005 and 2006. Senator NELSON and I offered that legislation as an amendment to include during the port security bill consideration. A vote on that amendment was denied by the Senate leadership.

Last week, I once again tried to get the Senate to adopt disaster relief legislation. Again, the efforts were thwarted by the majority leadership.

Today, as we are about to recess the Senate, I will offer a revised version of the important disaster legislation. Let me make clear to my colleagues, these are the disaster provisions that have already been approved by the Senate, but we have made a modification because the administration has said there are two provisions they object to. Those provisions—the economic assistance provisions to help offset the rising cost of energy, and the additional grants to the States to deal with the livestock losses—we have removed those two provisions the administration has objected to.

We retain the crop and livestock production loss provisions of the original legislation. Crop producers will still need to demonstrate a 35-percent loss before they get anything. Payments for the livestock compensation program will only be made to producers whose operations are in counties designated as disaster areas by the Secretary, and who can demonstrate they suffered a material loss.

It also contains additional funding for conservation programs to help restore and rehabilitate drought and wildlife losses on grazing lands.

As I have indicated, my new legislation eliminates the emergency economic assistance for program crop and dairy producers, and it strikes the supplemental grants to the States to assist other livestock and specialty crop producers.

These provisions were included in the original bill, but because the administration has objected, we have removed them. By making these changes, the Secretary's opposition no longer has any basis.

The cost of providing emergency disaster assistance for losses in 2005 and 2006 is reduced from \$6.7 billion in my original bill to \$4.9 billion in this legislation.

Farmers and ranchers need assistance for 2005 and 2006 natural disasters, and they need it now. If these emergencies are not dealt with, tens of thousands of farm families and main street businesses will suffer, some of them irretrievably. It is time for Congress to act and to allow this legislation to be voted on. Let's give our colleagues a chance to vote. We have removed the reasons for the objection from the administration.

I urge my colleagues to act.

Mr. President, I ask the Presiding Officer, how much time do I have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CHAMBLISS). The Senator has 22 minutes remaining.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask the Senator from South Dakota if he could take 4 minutes? I yield 4 minutes

to the Senator from South Dakota; and to the Senator from North Dakota, if I could give 4 minutes; and the Senator from Montana 4 minutes; and then the Senator from Nebraska 4 minutes as well.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I am glad to join my colleague from North Dakota today and support him and the other 20 Senators who are on this bill in moving disaster assistance through the Senate.

As the Senator from North Dakota has noted—you saw the drought chart he put up earlier—the Dakotas were the epicenter when it comes to drought this year. We had the bull's-eye, the area where the most severe drought hit.

I visited in South Dakota in June. At that point, we had no wheat crop. In all of central South Dakota, both winter wheat and spring wheat were all wiped out.

I went back in July to central South Dakota and looked at other parts of the State. By then, we could tell we were not going to have a corn crop. I went to western South Dakota in August with my colleague Senator JOHNSON. We traveled to areas west of the Missouri River and again to the central part of the State. We looked at corn that rivaled what the Senator from North Dakota showed that was about this tall—or about this tall—when it ought to have been in full bloom.

The livestock producers in western South Dakota had no hay crop. As a consequence, many of them had to liquidate their herds. What that means is that effect is felt not only directly by them and those families, but by the entire rural area, the entire farm economy in my State and States such as North Dakota.

It would be one thing if it were a 1-year deal. But this is successive years of drought, 6 years in a row, 1999, 2000, on through 2005. We have had these types of weather conditions in our States. The month of July was the hottest July on record in my State. In the months of May and June we normally would get precipitation. We had less precipitation than the average during the years of the Great Depression—the biggest disaster to ever hit farm country.

We respond as a country, as a Congress, when other areas of the country are impacted.

We do it when we have hurricanes. Many stepped up and supported the assistance for areas in the gulf. This is the same sort of disaster. It has the same sort of effect. It may not have the immediate aftermath you see when a hurricane strikes. It is a slow-motion disaster, but the effect on the economy in places in the Midwest is just as disastrous and devastating.

Mr. President, we need action. We need the Senate to do what it has done

in the past; that is, step forward and provide relief for these hard-hit farmers and ranchers in the Midwest. It was noted by my colleague from North Dakota that the Senate has, on a couple occasions, passed drought disaster relief. We need to get it passed. I am happy to join in that effort.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THUNE). The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, my colleague said it well. This is a picture of Frank Barnick walking in a creekbed that used to provide water for his cattle. One day this summer, it was 112 degrees in North Dakota. You can see the devastating drought that has occurred. The land looks like a moonscape.

Frank Barnick said this:

It is the worst drought I have ever seen. You do a lot of praying and wondering how you are going to get through it.

One way you get through these things is when Congress decides to reach out with a helping hand and say: We want to help you, you are not alone. We have always done that. Somehow, this year it hasn't been quite as urgent to do it. I don't understand that.

Senator BURNS and I have twice moved legislation through the Appropriations Committee. The Senate has twice passed agricultural disaster aid. It has moved through the Appropriations Committee a third time. My colleague, Senator CONRAD, taking the lead in drafting, with many of us assisting, created the disaster legislation now pending that we should, by consent, move through the Senate. Yet somehow it remains blocked. It is not urgent for some. This isn't about the major industries—the pharmaceutical industry, the oil industry, or about another big industry—this is about individual families living a hard life, trying to make a living during tough times.

Will Congress help? We have helped endangered species. We can deal with them—birds, bats, butterflies, black-footed ferrets, and prairie dogs. When they are endangered, we say: Let's help. There is a species called family farmers and family ranchers who are out on the land living alone, trying to make do by themselves. When tough times come, when weather-related disasters come, they need help.

With the Katrina victims, when those who live on farms in the gulf were devastated by Hurricane Katrina, this Congress passed agricultural disaster aid for them. This Congress said yes. So did this President. They just said to all the rest of you in the country out there on the farm or ranch who got hit by an agricultural disaster, a weather-related disaster: You are out of luck, we don't support you. That was the message from the President. So he blocked it.

These are Republicans and Democrats on the floor of the Senate today working together to say this needs to get done. This is a priority. I hear the President and others go all around the world when there is trouble to say: Let us help. We are there to help you. What about here at home? Do we need to help here? You bet your life we do. We need to do it now.

The question of whether these folks will farm and ranch next year depends on whether we do what we are required and responsible to do. The answer for the last year now, and recent months, is that somehow we don't have time or the urgency and that we cannot quite get this done. That is the wrong priority for this country. This country has a responsibility to reach out to help its own, reach out to help people who are in trouble.

These are American all-stars, the people who live on the farms. They produce food for a hungry world. They don't ask for very much. When a weather disaster strikes—a hurricane, a drought, or a flood—and their entire income is washed away, they would hope, I would hope, and I think the values of our country would expect, that we would reach out a helping hand and say: We want to do this now. It is a time-honored tradition.

We are not asking for something strange or different. We have always helped during tough times. Let's make this an urgent priority this afternoon; we can do this. Let's make this a priority and decide we are going to do the right thing for America's family farmers and ranchers.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I don't know of anything more frustrating to all of us who come from farm and ranch country than to try to get this taken care of. We tried to take care of it last year and didn't get it done. There was no urgency. We had a fairly good crop this year. We were not the epicenter of the drought. We have been in that bull's-eye now for 6, going on 7 years. It takes its toll not only on wells but reservoirs and streams.

I am here in support of this because I will tell you that the Dakotas were the epicenter, and they helped us out when we needed it. We are going to try to help them out the best we can and do something.

This year in range country, we probably had more range fires burning—over 800,000 acres in Montana alone. We had a lot of growth to our grass in the first part of the year. We hit July when it was terribly hot, and it became crisp. When August came, we got the fires. They were devastating, taking out fall pastures, hayfields, fences, even livestock, and we had to move a lot of livestock.

We need to boost this legislation. We have it back down to where I think it

is a pretty commonsense approach where nobody is getting rich. The only thing we are trying to do is just get the folks to next spring, get them into next year. That is what this piece of legislation is all about. There is nothing excessive in this piece of legislation or the money we will spend. There is not. All of that has been taken out. This is barebones. This is the basics to their operations. We need to pass it this afternoon. I call on the leadership from both sides of the aisle to urgently take a look at this and make sure we get it done before we go home.

Mr. President, I heartily support this, and I know the man in the chair right now, who probably knows his State about as good as anybody—he was raised “west of the river,” as we call it, in South Dakota. I have never seen an area as devastated by drought as this area was. You could not raise a fence.

So I would call on the leadership to take a look at this, pass it this afternoon, and get them some money before next spring rolls around.

I thank my good friends from North Dakota for their leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for an additional minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senators DAYTON, MURRAY, JEFFORDS, ENZI, and THOMAS be added as original cosponsors.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from South Dakota be given 4 minutes and the Senator from Minnesota, Mr. DAYTON, be given 4 minutes at the conclusion of Senator NELSON's remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is that from the Senator's time?

Mr. CONRAD. Yes, out of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of S. 3991, the Emergency Farm Relief Act of 2006. I thank my colleague, Senator CONRAD, for his hard work and leadership in trying to get this bill passed. We have all been working together on a bipartisan basis.

The Presiding Officer spoke eloquently about the need for this relief. Today is the last day for this Congress to consider providing relief for our Nation's farmers and ranchers who have suffered through multiple years of drought and other natural disasters. This is the time we can do it, before we adjourn for the elections.

I am frustrated with our refusal to provide relief to farmers and ranchers

suffering from this particular natural disaster even though we seem to have no problems providing relief for other natural disasters, such as hurricanes. I accept the fact that we do that, but I don't accept the fact that we do that and fail to do this.

Mr. President, I have a chart here which shows the extent of the drought in the Midwest and down into Texas. You can see where the hotspots are. I will tell you that this only tracks it most recently. It doesn't show the extent of the damage that has happened over 5 to 7 years. So if you just overlaid 5 or 7 years on this, you would see where the drought has continued.

I decided that maybe to get parity here for this kind of disaster it might be helpful to give the drought some identification. So, unilaterally, I decided to name it “Drought David,” the same way we name hurricanes.

The unfortunate fact is that Drought David has, in some instances and in some locations, experienced its fifth birthday and, in some other areas, its seventh birthday.

Failure to provide this needed relief threatens many small rural businesses and communities as well as farmers and ranchers. It threatens our Nation's food and fuel security efforts. So today I join my colleagues and thank Senator CONRAD for his final push because this is, in fact, a bipartisan effort to try to take care of those who are experiencing losses that are far beyond their ability to sustain and, certainly, far beyond their control.

Over the last few years, I think we have begun to understand that a drought has devastating impacts in much the same way hurricanes do in other locations. The difference is that a hurricane or a flood is a fast-moving disaster; this is a slow-moving disaster that can go over the course of years, as I have indicated. Giving it a name, I hope, will somehow have the impact of our colleagues understanding that this is an incident which goes over a long period of time; nevertheless, the devastation can be considerable, and in some cases the economic losses can be the same as those who have other disasters.

We cannot prevent a drought, but Congress can help when a drought devastates large portions of our country. Some said maybe what we need to do is make sure the crop insurance program takes care of it. Well, the crop insurance program is for an occasional loss, not a continuing and sustained loss such as this. To give some sort of an analogy, you could not have insurance that would cover your house if it burned down every year, but occasional loss can be covered by insurance. This is just not coverable by insurance the way that it is right now. We cannot prevent it, but we can help. That is what we are all about today.

I am happy to report that we have taken some action that I think will be

helpful. Just the other day, the Commerce Committee passed my NIDIS—National Integrated Drought Information System—legislation. That will help us create a system that will give us early warning so we will know how long droughts continue, give us better ideas about what drought conditions are predicted. This early warning system will give farmers and ranchers a better idea of what to expect. They can make planning decisions or livestock decisions based on the kind of information that will be available.

Unfortunately, at the present time, we are where we are, and we are not where we would like to be. We hope we will have the opportunity today with unanimous consent to move this bill forward. We can do it before we break, whether it is tonight, tomorrow, or Sunday. We need to get this done. There is no justification. We can ask the question: If not now, when? If not now, why?

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I thank Senator CONRAD for this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I thank the Senators from North Dakota, Mr. CONRAD and Mr. DORGAN, for their extraordinary leadership on this issue.

We have a crisis of enormous proportions across a large swath of America, from the Canadian border all the way to Mexico. My home State of South Dakota, as has been noted, is virtually the epicenter of what has been a drought, not just a catastrophic drought this year but the previous year and some portions of South Dakota going back to the year 2000. It has been devastating to our agricultural economy, but then as well to our Main Streets, to the economy of that entire region.

Recently, I joined with my colleague, Senator THUNE, in a joint drought tour around portions of South Dakota that have been worst hit. It was evident that the needs were urgent.

We saw herds being sold off entirely, calves being sold prematurely. We saw the factory, in effect, being sold off from the livestock sector of our State.

In the crop areas, we saw areas where there was corn that was perhaps 6 inches high with no ears. In other areas, you would have to get out of the pickup and kick the dust to tell what had been planted, whether it was soybeans, corn, whatever. It was entirely lost.

There are stock dams without water. Farming operations—good operations—that have been in the family for generations, some 100 years or more, are in great jeopardy.

So I am here today to share my support for getting on with disaster relief.

We passed disaster relief for the 2005 drought as part of the supplemental appropriations bill. Unfortunately, when

it went to the House, the agriculture portion of it was largely stripped out. We provided money to rebuild Iraq and money to rebuild Katrina—and I wish them all well—but there is a lack of regard for the crisis that exists in rural America.

The administration is talking about rebuilding Iraqi agriculture in rural communities. That is fine. But we have American farmers and ranchers and American Main Streets that need some attention, and that need for attention is urgent.

We attempted to pass agriculture relief on the Agriculture appropriations bill, but that has now been delayed until after the election. Whether we are able to hold on to that funding remains to be seen.

Clearly, we will have progress if we continue the bipartisan support we have up to now exhibited in the Senate where there has been pretty good support, with Republicans and Democrats, Senators from all regions behind us on this issue. We need to have support from the White House as well.

It is my hope that the White House will recognize that this drought has only grown worse, the needs more urgent. Senator CONRAD, to his good credit, has worked very closely with the White House and with others to reduce the cost of this effort, to meet some of the objections that have been raised by the White House and by USDA.

So what we have here is a drought bill that would cost about the equivalent of 2 weeks' expenditure in Iraq for the entire Nation, for the entire year, for multiple drought years.

It is important we recognize droughts are disasters, just as much as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes. They are less dramatic because they happen through a drawn-out period of time, but they are just as devastating. Just as Americans come together to deal with disasters that occur in other parts of the country, we need to come together on this disaster as well. Americans looking after Americans.

We are now at the final shred of time left in this Congress. This is our last remaining hope to get this done. It is my hope we can set aside partisan politics and appreciate the losses that are being sustained are losses that are happening to American farmers and ranchers and American Main Streets, and it needs an American response.

If we pull together in this body, I am confident that we will, in fact, make some progress. There still is time, but we have to act now.

Again, Mr. President, I urge my colleagues, I urge USDA, the White House, and our friends in the other body to recognize the critical need, the urgent need for attention to this catastrophic string of drought years that our farmers and ranchers and Main Streets are facing.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Ten minutes.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I yield 4 minutes to the Senator from Minnesota. If he uses less, he can yield time back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, I thank my distinguished colleague from North Dakota, Mr. CONRAD, who championed this cause of disaster relief for not only his farmers in North Dakota but across the affected areas, which certainly includes my State of Minnesota.

As others noted, this is a bipartisan effort. I see my friend and colleague, Senator COLEMAN from Minnesota, is here also. We stand together to make this a bipartisan effort on behalf of the farmers throughout our State who have been devastated by these natural disasters over the last few years and particularly the last 2 years to which this bill applies.

I regret that this has been passed by the Senate before. I commend this body for doing so, again, on a very strong bipartisan basis. Unfortunately, the administration has not been willing to allow this funding to go forward or even some part of it. This is long overdue.

It is unfortunate that we are now at the 11th hour, the 59th minute of this session in this year, and we haven't even addressed the disaster relief necessary for the last calendar year. This legislation would deal with that and also this year's relief.

This disaster has afflicted our State, and some of our counties have lost three-fourths of our crops. In fact, almost half the counties in Minnesota have already been declared disaster areas.

The crisis is real. The suffering is acute. As others said, we have a magnitude of disaster in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, but a disaster is a disaster. A complete disaster is as devastating to a family in northwestern Minnesota as it is to a family in New Orleans.

I urge my colleagues, once again, to support this measure, and I plead with the House and the administration to work out these differences so that these farmers and their farms can be saved, and their families can be saved. It is only simple justice and humanity.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I can yield 3 minutes to the Senator from Minnesota. We have now run down the clock.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from North Dakota for yielding me time.

I stand with my colleague from Minnesota, Senator DAYTON, in bipartisan

agreement. This is not a partisan issue, and it should not be a partisan issue. I consider this one of the most important pieces of legislation that has been left undone this year, agricultural disaster assistance.

While this body has come to the aid of producers in the gulf affected by hurricanes who need agricultural disaster assistance, Minnesota's farmers and families have been left to fend for themselves in the face of natural disasters—the flooding of 2005 and the record drought in 2006.

In the sugar sector alone, revenue was reduced by \$60 million in Minnesota in 2005 thanks to this natural disaster. In one county, crop loss exceeded \$52 million, and farmers were prevented from planting over 90,000 acres thanks to saturated fields. These are not just numbers; these are people's lives. These are their livelihoods. There is a sense of history and connection to the land, and the future is now at risk.

I was up at Lake Bronson, MN, in northwest Minnesota, and met with over 100 farmers. It is their lives. The farmers are calling my office desperate to save the family farm. Farmers are losing operations, pure and simple.

Some folks in Washington cited the overall success of agriculture in 2006, the aggregate numbers, as justification for withholding assistance. Congress didn't look at the overall economy in determining what sort of assistance to give those affected by the great disaster in the gulf. We didn't cite the Nation's robust GDP growth and low unemployment rate as a reason not to assist gulf communities whose local economies were devastated by natural disaster. Nor should we propose such a false standard for comprehensive agricultural disaster assistance.

It is true that the suffering in the gulf is great. I have seen the tremendous damage myself. I have come to this floor time and again to lend my hand to fellow Americans. I can't help but think of the 100-year flood in the Red River Valley. Senator DAYTON knows; he was there. We saw neighbors fighting a flood together one sand bag at a time, regardless of whose house was closest to the water.

Your State might not be the closest to the flooding that occurred in my State last year or the drought this year, but as a neighbor of mine, a fellow American, I just ask you to help me fight the natural disaster being endured in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and other parts of this country. None in this body can build a dike on our own. Please allow this assistance to go forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I have been advised that an objection will be raised when we make the request to go

to this bill. I deeply regret that. I cannot tell colleagues how deeply I regret that because we have tried to meet not every objection that has been raised.

We were told that the only objection left to this legislation was that there were provisions that could conceivably help someone not damaged by natural disaster, even though they had been damaged by the sharp runup of energy costs.

The legislation as previously passed by the Senate could aid those who were not hurt by natural disaster. So we took out those provisions, with a savings of \$1.9 billion.

Now what is left are the most basic disaster provisions that have been provided by Congress in disaster after disaster. This is national legislation; it is not regional. It is national. Nobody gets any assistance unless they have had at least a 35-percent loss. And if they have had at least a 35-percent loss, they get no help for that first 35-percent loss. They get nothing. Zero. It is only if they have had a loss of more than 35 percent that they get any help, and the assistance only then applies to after they have had the loss of 35 percent. Once you get beyond that, then assistance begins.

No one is made whole. No one is enriched. What people are given is a chance to make it to next year. That is what is in doubt.

The bankers of my State have told me that if there is a failure to provide this kind of assistance, 5 to 10 percent of the producers in my State will be forced off the land. That is the reality of what we confront.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending business be set aside.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I regret very much an objection has been raised. We have done everything we have been asked to do to alter this legislation to meet the objections previously raised.

So I ask one more time, Mr. President: I ask unanimous consent that the pending business be set aside.

Mr. GREGG. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, the Senator has that right. I regret that he has exercised that right. What we have done on a bipartisan basis now, 23 Senators have come endorsing this legislation on a fully bipartisan basis asking for help of the most basic sort. I must say, as one Senator, if we can't get assistance in this kind of circumstance, we are going to have to think long and hard when other colleagues come to us about assistance for their areas when they suffer disaster. Always before we

have responded in kind. We have helped those who have had disaster, whether it is flood or hurricane or whatever disaster. And now we are told that a drought somehow is not worthy of assistance. I must say, I think it is shameful.

The people are about to lose their livelihoods. We have done everything we have been asked to do to reduce the cost of this bill, and now we are told: Sorry, there is no help. We won't even consider it. We won't even allow a vote to occur because we know what would happen if there was a vote. It would be overwhelmingly passed, as it has been in the past when it was far more expensive than the bill we come with today.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CONRAD. I am happy to yield.

Mr. ROBERTS. I ask unanimous consent that I be added as a cosponsor to this legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, the reason we know it would pass, I would say to the gentleman, and I thank him for introducing this—and I am a little out of breath because I didn't realize we were debating this, so I ran over here. But at any rate, I thank my colleague for introducing this bill.

The reason we know it would pass is it has already passed the Senate as part of the supplemental. It is about \$4 billion. Everybody understood at that particular time we had an urgent need in farm country. Everybody understood at that particular time we had a lot of problems with disasters, but as others have pointed out, if you have a hurricane, you get in the headlines. If you have a forest fire, you are getting headlines. If you have those kinds of tragedies, like a flood or even a mudslide in a State where people build houses perhaps where they shouldn't build them—obviously it attracts attention.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be granted an additional 5 minutes. I know there are other Members waiting, but I would like to at least proceed with the Senator, my friend, for another 5 minutes, if that would be all right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that—I was to be the next speaker for 15 minutes, so I ask that I be granted 20 minutes on my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ROBERTS. I wish to thank Senator GREGG for his generosity in regard to allowing me, with the gentleman yielding to me, to make some additional comments.

I was saying that all of these tragedies end up in the headlines. We know,

and all of us who are privileged to represent rural areas, especially the Plains, that we have had a drought not 1, not 2, but in some cases 5 or 7 years in a row, and we know we don't have any subsoil moisture. We also know energy prices have gone up 113 percent since 2002. It isn't exactly that we were rolling in clover to begin with, but now there is no clover that will come up.

We also know, although people may not want to talk about it right now, that the current farm bill doesn't work in this circumstance. I voted against the current farm bill. It is not my intent to come down here and discuss the farm bill, however, there are some very real problems. First, it is the counter-cyclical program. It means when a farmer doesn't have a crop, he gets no payment. It also means he has no real crop insurance because the average production history on his crop insurance has gone down. So no crop insurance, no payment. High and dry. This is the only way we are going to provide assistance to farmers.

Now, I regret it is the 11th hour and 59th minute. I fully expect an objection. I hope that would not take place. But at any rate, we are building a case that if we have to come back here during what is called a lameduck session, something can be done. I credit the Senator for his leadership in this regard.

A drought is a drought is a drought, and it doesn't get much attention, but the people affected suffer just as much as people who suffer from other tragedies. I again credit the Senator for bringing this up. I am a cosponsor. Whatever we get done, I look forward to working with him. We have done it in the past. We did it with the supplemental. It was taken out in the House, by the way. We need this relief, and we need it now.

As I said before, I will vote for the bill, and I will speak for it, as I have done. And quite frankly, if this is headed for a Presidential veto, I will vote to override it.

I thank the Senator.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I thank very much the Senator from Kansas, the former chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and a real leader on the Senate Agriculture Committee and my friend. I would advise him that an objection has already been raised, so we are going to be denied even a chance to vote. I regret that and I regret that deeply because I know what it means, after having been all across my State and having farmers tell me—some farmers who have been in the business for more than 30 years who have told me this will be their last year; to have had the bankers of my State come to Washington to tell me that if there is a failure to provide disaster assistance, 5 to 10 percent of the farm and ranch families of my State will be put out of business. That is the harsh reality. And

this afternoon, an objection has been raised and raised in a way that will preclude us from even having a vote. I think we all know what would happen if a vote were held: this legislation would pass, and it would pass overwhelmingly.

We should advise our colleagues this will not be our last attempt. If there is a lameduck session, we will be here and we will insist on the chance to have consideration for this legislation.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. CONRAD. I am happy to yield.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 1 minute 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, let me just follow up on the point that this would be a bipartisan vote here in the Senate today. I want to point out that the piece of legislation Senator CONRAD has worked on and that I have added as an appropriations measure twice has passed the Senate. Twice I was in conference with that. Twice it was defeated in conference. I wish to make that point because the implication was the Department of Agriculture didn't have much to do with that. The fact is the House conferees defeated this because the President threatened to veto it, and the House conferees were listening to the Department of Agriculture, which also opposed it.

Look, it seems to me we need the administration to understand what is going on here. This is bipartisan on the floor of the Senate. We need some help downtown as well from the Department of Agriculture as well as the White House to get this done.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I have been asked to ask unanimous consent that Senator CLINTON be given 15 minutes at the end of the current queue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. GREGG. Yes. I have a unanimous consent request that following Senator HUTCHISON, who will follow me, the following Senators be recognized in order: Senator CLINTON for 15 minutes, Senator CHAFFEE for 5 minutes, Senator KYL for 15 minutes, and Senator BYRD for up to 45 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized to speak on the bill I believe is before the Senate, the Secure Fence Act, for up to 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized for 20 minutes.

EFFECTS OF BUSH TAX CUTS

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I rise today to speak briefly on what is an in-

teresting point that I think needs to be made a few times because there has been a bit of discussion in this Chamber and questions in the public's mind as to how the President's tax cuts have affected the economy and affected Americans.

If we were to listen to the mainstream press from the Northeast, for example, or to the mainstream commentary and to our colleagues on the other side, you would think the President's tax cuts were basically a benefit to the wealthy in America to the detriment to those who are not so wealthy. That is the basic theme—class warfare. That is what we hear day in and day out.

Well, the facts are in. The facts are in on the President's tax cuts, and they are very good for this country.

To begin with, let's put in context when those tax cuts occurred. At the end of the Clinton administration, we had seen the largest economic bubble in the history of America. The stock market went up dramatically, way past real values, based on basically paper, as a result of speculation around the Internet. That bubble collapsed, forcing us into a recession. That was followed by the attack of 9/11, which was not only a traumatic cultural event for us, involving a horrific loss of life, it was also a huge economic attack on the American economy. Those two things together should have thrown us into almost a depression or certainly an extraordinarily severe recession.

But what happened in the middle of this was that the President suggested cutting tax rates on all Americans. That tax cut came at just the right time because it softened the blow of those two huge economic events, those two extraordinarily recessionary events, and allowed the economy to bottom-out in a shallower and less harmful way and start to move back up dramatically. In fact, the practical effect of those tax cuts is the following because after 5 years, we know the facts, very interesting facts.

No. 1, the revenue to the Federal Government has increased dramatically as a result of the tax cuts.

No. 2, interestingly enough, high-income Americans, the highest income Americans, the top 20 percent of Americans in income are paying a higher share—a higher share of American income—of the income tax burden of America than they did under the Clinton years.

No. 3, low-income Americans, those people who are in the bottom 20 percent who don't pay any income tax to begin with, are actually getting back from the Government in the form of direct subsidy through something called the earned-income tax credit more money than they received in the Clinton years.

So you have the situation where the Federal share of revenue taken out of