OPPOSITION TO PRIVATIZING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KELLER). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. SHOWS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHOWS. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise to express my concern in opposition to privatizing air traffic controllers in airports across our country.

I do not know about my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, but the safety of the flying public should not be done by the lowest bidder. Congress has already determined that privatization does not guarantee better service, safety, or efficiency.

Frankly, we were all shocked to learn of the President's executive order, released last Friday, deleting the words ''an inherently governmental function'' from an executive order of December 2000 regarding air traffic controllers, which set the wheels of privatization into motion.

It is amazing to me that this Congress has invested billions of dollars on a new agency to federalize baggage screeners while at the same time entertaining the idea of contracting out our important air traffic control positions for the cheapest offer. This is an illogical step and inconsistent with our previous attempts to ensure a safe means of transportation.

We should heed warnings from other countries that are currently struggling under privatization. The privatized systems of Canada and Great Britain have not worked. Canada has delayed buying new equipment, postponed hiring new controllers, and even increased fees to cover costs.

□ 2030

Great Britain resorted to the banks for a bailout. Is this the system we want to follow? In talking about privatization and Social Security, I think we have a comparison. Look what happened to the stock market. What would happen if we privatized Social Security today.

We talk about competition. I wish the President and the administration would look at competition towards pharmaceutical companies and bidding on the Medicare prescription drug program, having pharmaceutical companies bid to get the business of Medicare for pharmaceutical drugs for our seniors. It makes it competitive, but they will not talk about that. During the confusion of September 11, our hardworking air traffic controllers landed 5,000 planes in less than 2 hours without one operational error. Should we privatize a system that performed so efficiently and accurately during the most critical day of all days?

I hope this Congress is not fooled by the promise, or gimmick, of privatization.

AGRICULTURAL CROSSROADS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KELLER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, last month's enactment of the agriculture authorization bill signaled that we are at a crossroads here in America, not just as it relates to agriculture, but very interesting developments for the environment, community development, and even the huge increase in agricultural funding could not conceal the cracks that are emerging as these issues are coming forward.

Hidden behind all of the fireworks that surrounded the agricultural bill, we have ended up with it being further removed from the needs of most farmers. It is not only removed from the public we are supposed to serve, not only removed from the agricultural interests, but it is even removed from the will of the Members of this body.

I recall on this floor working hard on a motion to instruct the conferees of the House to vote in favor of provisions of the Senate that would have placed a $275,000 payment limit. Despite the fact that it was passed by 265 of our colleagues, it was ignored by the conferees in favor of a $360,000 payment limit that itself was riddled with exemptions which will make it largely meaningless.

Mr. Speaker, I am afraid we are having two very different visions of the agricultural future of this country emerge as a part of those deliberations. One is for the status quo which is a mutation of over 70 years of depression-era subsidization which no longer meets the needs of average farmers, consumers, and certainly not the environment.

This vision is opposed to one that is economically sound, a sustainable future, that is in fact healthy for the farmers, the environment, consumers and the taxpayer. What matters? Why would a city representative like me become so interested in farm policy? Well, we cannot deal with the governments of this country without focusing on the role that agriculture plays. It is firmly grounded in American lore, our history and our tradition. Think back to Thomas Jefferson's agrarian ideals. Ignore for a moment that this was sort of an effete intellectual who never turned a profit on his many acres of land and several hundred slaves, never mind that he was hopelessly in debt, and eventually lost his estate at his death to his creditors. Nevertheless, that vision, that agrarian ideal of Thomas Jefferson persists; and agriculture still is essential today to America, even though only 2 percent of our population is actively involved with farming, versus 25 percent or more in the 1930s. There are still 2 million family farms and ranches that cover nearly 50 percent of the land area in the lower 48 States.

Americans spend 10 percent of their income on food, and that is one of the lowest ratios in the world. However, this 10 percent that we spend is disguised by a variety of subsidies and tax payments. Indeed, 40 percent of net farm income comes from the Federal Government. So there are a great number of tax dollars that are claimed. There are huge environmental costs that are associated with our current system of production which I will talk about in a few minutes, and consumers are paying exorbitant prices for commodities like sugar, more than twice the world market, pay dearly for avocados, peanuts, and the list goes on.

The environmental impacts of agribusiness is something that I think is important for us to focus on. It is, for instance, in many areas extraordinarily water-intensive. It is not just a problem occasionally when we have some parts of the country as they are today facing drought and water quality problems. Although even the administration seems to acknowledge that we are going to be facing serious problems associated with global climate change, they are not prepared to offer up any solutions for that, but that is going to have potentially very profound effects on how water is supplied in the future.

Mr. Speaker, it takes a tremendous amount of water for us to be involved in some grotesquely inappropriate activities. We are providing heavily subsidized water for subsidized crops, like growing cotton and rice in the desert. In the Pacific Northwest, we have been having problems in the Klamath River basin where we have water-intensive agriculture in an arid plane.

It takes an enormous amount of water to produce meat for human consumption. 1,000 tons of water for one ton of grain; and increasingly, our cattle are grain fed and it requires almost 5 pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef for human consumption. If we do the math, you see the huge amount of water that is involved in the production of cattle.

Agriculture also poses many of the most important challenges to water quality. It contributes to poor water quality in 60 percent of the Nation's impaired river miles, which is more than the dams, sewage discharges, and urban storm drainage combined. Think of it. Agriculture produces 60 percent of the water quality problems in the Nation's impaired river miles, more than dams, sewage discharges, and urban storm drainage combined.

We have a situation where the petrochemical fertilizers are also extensively required. It takes on average approximately 1.2 gallons for every bushel of corn. And then there is the oil production for energy. A typical cow will consume the equivalent of 284 gallons of oil in their lifetime, the energy necessary to sustain that animal. We have essentially transformed cattle from solar-powered animals to fossil fuel machines.

It is also a diet that is unhealthy and unnatural for these animals. It has turned once bucolic agricultural enterprises into an extension of the modern

factory. And it has not just made these animals' lives miserable, based entirely on eating, adding weight until they can be slaughtered, but there is persuasive evidence that it is actually changing their metabolisms and their digestive systems, producing meat that is demonstrably less healthy to consume in the short-term, and maybe having long-term consequences that are extraordinarily negative for overall human health. There have been studies which have contrasted some of the natural, grass-fed beef in Italy where there is approximately 15 percent of the fat, as opposed to grain-fed beef and 38 percent of the calories of standard cattle.

It goes beyond just the fat content. There are concerns about developing resistance to medicines due to the indiscriminate use of antibiotics. It is estimated that 80 percent of the total quantity of antibiotics used in the United States are administered to food animals, putting that in the food chain. It may well be that the kind of meat that we are eating today as a society is much less healthy because of the increased presence of these antibiotics which in turn build up resistance from the germs and create a cycle which makes us more susceptible to stronger germs, and having less ability to use antibiotics to protect us.

And of course, dealing with the fat, our House physician has been working with Members in this chamber to encourage more awareness of our lifestyle, the problems of saturated fat. Now that the cows are eating more corn instead of grass, the meat contains more saturated fat. There is another health and environmental problem dealing with prodigious quantities of animal waste.

We are finding that county after county in States like Nebraska are now moving into areas of land-use planning because they are being overwhelmed by the consequences of these concentrated feed lot operations.

In Iowa, it is an issue of hog waste. A hog can produce up to 10 times the waste of a human. U.S. factory farms generated 1.4 billion tons of animal waste in 1996 according to the EPA. Imagine a farm of 100,000 hogs. It could produce the waste of a city of almost a million people, yet we will look at a State like North Carolina, where there are no requirements for the sewage treatment plant of these vast hog operations. Think of that. Living next to a city of 100,000, 500,000, up to a million people, and not having adequate sewage treatment. We would not stand for it. Sadly, in this country, in many rural areas, the States do not have adequate protection to ensure that these vast quantities of waste are going to be adequately processed to protect against damage to water quality.

Again, in some States they have bent over backwards in fact to protect these interests at the expense of people. In Iowa, their State legislature in its wisdom has prevented local governments from providing land use protections against the damage that is brought about by these vast hog factory farms. In fact, it was interesting recently in Iowa there was a special election for a State Senate position where the incumbent, a Republican in a very safe Republican district, had been appointed by the President to some administrative position. There was a special election. The outrage in this Republican district was such that with a 62 percent vote, they elected a Democrat to take that position.

There is slowly at the grassroots level a realization that States and the Federal Government that are not dealing with the protection of the citizens, are doing them a disservice. People in Iowa again cannot sue for damages as long as some minimum spacing requirement is maintained. There have been people who have basically lost the entire value of their property with no recourse as a result of it.

In North Carolina, I am sad to say, the Members of this House in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd a couple of years ago, and Members may recall in the aftermath of that terrible hurricane, the damage that was done. Our hearts went out to the people of North Carolina. We stepped up, provided money and disaster assistance, but who can forget the disgusting photos of the bloated bodies of hogs, or hogs perched on floating debris.

□ 2045

As a result of those floods, there were massive problems associated with hog lagoons in flood plains that resulted in a leaching of these animal wastes, these toxins, out into the environment for months after the hurricane. Unfortunately, Federal money was spent to rebuild those hog lagoons in the flood plains, back in harm's way, where again in the future, as sure as anything, we are going to be faced with that tragedy again, the damage to the environment.

We are finding that in State after State there are problems with large farm operations that change the hydrology of farm country. There is creation of vast amounts of soil erosion that takes the toxins and the fertilizers and washes it into waterways, actually waterways that did not used to be there. Throughout the upper Midwest, we have these vast fields today that are a result of miles and miles, hundreds of thousands of miles, of drainage tiles that have been installed. Yet we have not taken the steps that are necessary in the main to protect the further erosion of the soil, the toxins, into those waterways.

And it is not just a case of erosion, pesticides, toxins. We are losing vast acreages of farmland still to sprawl. More than 90 million acres of farmland across this Nation are threatened by sprawl today, and we lose more than 2 million acres every year to urban development. That is more than all the topsoil that is eroded. We cover it with blacktop. The number of acres of farmland lost to sprawl has doubled over the last 6 years, most of which was amongst our most productive farmland.

Think back in history. What was the most productive farm county in the United States in 1950? Los Angeles County. From what we have seen, this pattern continues. Because the settlement patterns were in areas that were rich agricultural arenas, people moved there. That is where the settlements started. There were trade activities. People radiated out from them in areas that were the most productive farmland. Thus it is today that most of our major metropolitan areas are in and around extraordinarily productive farmland. But we are watching this farmland being lost at a dramatic rate.

It took us approximately 350 years to create America's footprint of urban development and settlement. Three hundred fifty years. But 15 percent of that footprint occurred in the years 1992 to 1997. We developed an area approximately 17 million acres. This is approximately the size of West Virginia. It is important, Mr. Speaker, for us to focus on the need of this country to be able to protect that delicate area where the urban and the farm areas intersect, and we must do a better job.

There are some that suggest that this is an area or that it is something that the Federal Government does not belong in, that if we are talking about land use and agricultural policy, that is something that is local and State. I would beg to differ. American agriculture has developed as a direct result of Federal Government policy. It started when the Federal Government enforced taking land away from Native Americans and giving it to European settlers to farm during the beginning of the Republic. We had major pieces of legislation that exploded, the Homestead Act of 1862, legislation that created the land grant colleges where we had the agricultural colleges and universities. There were the vast reclamation projects that changed the hydrology of whole ecosystems.

I mentioned earlier in the Pacific Northwest, the Klamath Basin. This has been an area of great agitation and concern because we had these interests clash this last year when we had extreme drought conditions, and it sort of put a spotlight on the fallacy of the Federal programs over the last 100 years. We committed as a Federal Government far more in terms of water than we could deliver to those farmers that we lured to that area. We lured them a century ago, we did it again after World War II when we encouraged returning veterans to settle in the Klamath Basin, but a terrible price has been paid.

We have overallocated water rights to farmers and ignored critical habitat requirements. This vast Klamath River Basin is an area where the flightway for 90 percent of the north-south migratory waterfowl stop. It is an area

where there are significant commitments to other wildlife and, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that we have made, I think, a serious misstep deals with our commitments to Native Americans. Native Americans in this region and elsewhere, particularly in the arid West, had claims for fishing and hunting. Their water rights are not being properly acknowledged and respected. So in total in the Klamath River Basin as we have seen elsewhere in the West in particular, there is more than the U.S. Government and Mother Nature can now deliver.

But there was a front page story in the New York Times 10 days ago that talked about the problem that is being faced by the city of Atlanta, where there is a three-state struggle over scarce water in an area where people think of it as being rich and certainly water not being a problem. But it is. We have other areas here where we are dealing with the vast range of Federal programs that the Federal Government built, railroads at government expense that helped promote agriculture. I will, I guess, not go into that because the time is late and I want to deal with some of the other issues that relate to the way that the industry is structured today.

Today's agricultural industry looks far different than it did even a generation ago. We have huge agribusiness processing plants that are dominating the commodities, processing, meat packing. Eighty percent of the beef cattle born in this country are slaughtered and marketed by four giant meat packing companies. There is a similar concentration in poultry, in hog farming.

We are seeing increasingly with our agricultural programs, and the most recent farm bill sadly brings it to a new level, that we are concentrating those farm subsidies to large farms, large corporate interests, shutting out smaller operations and changing the nature of how people choose to farm based on government programs, not on what the marketplace requires.

One example that struck me was a story earlier this year in the New York Times celebrating how cotton was now king again in certain areas of Mississippi and Texas, that farmers did not have to grow soybeans, that somehow cotton was more in keeping with their traditions, and they liked it. But as you read the text of the article, it was not because somehow there was an upsurge of demand for cotton or that there has been a lack of interest in soybeans. It is just that for the time being, the rate of subsidization for cotton exceeded the rate of subsidization for soybeans, so we were growing cotton now. Cotton was king, not because that is what the marketplace wanted or demanded; it is because that is what the Federal Government's subsidies made more lucrative.

We have talked on the floor of this Chamber, and I have worked since I have been in Congress with my colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DAN MILLER), joined with the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), dealing with the outrageous situation we have in this country dealing with the sugar quota system. It is hard to imagine a cycle that is more frustrating for the taxpayers, more damaging for the environment and frankly makes us look more foolish.

Over the last 40 years, we have dramatically increased the acreage of sugar cane production in Florida's Everglades. It was approximately 60,000 acres. Today it is in the neighborhood of 450, 460,000 acres, an increase of more than seven times in 40 years. This has been fueled because the United States has a restrictive quota system that mandates that we in this country will pay two or three times the world price of sugar, and people that can grow it more cheaply or more efficiently are not able to bring it into this country. In fact, we are growing so much sugar that we are paying millions of dollars this year to store the surplus sugar.

But it is not just that the American consumers are paying more for the sugar and that they are paying to store the surplus sugar. We are also driving confectioners out of this country because people who are making candy rely heavily on sugar as a principal ingredient and sugar is so much more inexpensive just across the border in Canada or in Mexico that it does not make sense to manufacture these products in the United States. So Lifesavers, that quintessential American icon, is now moving its production out of the United States, in part because we are shooting ourselves in the foot with the environment, with the economy.

And of course, there is no small irony that this Congress in recent years has been patting itself on the back, the last two administrations have celebrated that we are investing $8.5 billion as a down payment to clean up the Everglades which are appropriately targeted for investment because they are a precious natural resource, a national treasure. But we are paying to clean up what we are subsidizing people to pollute at the same time we are paying the world market times two or three; and because of the sugar prices, we are driving candy manufacturers out of the United States. It is hard to imagine a textbook case that more vividly underscores how our environmental, trade and agricultural policies are bumping into each other, running amuck.

Indeed, I think you do not have to look very far to find examples where the farm bill is a pretty good barometer about how far out of whack things are. It is hard to get a good handle on the actual costs, because the official estimates that we used for the arcane sort of budget scoring were based on some numbers from April 2001 that by the time March of 2002 came around, earlier this spring, it was quite clear that the assumptions were wrong. Because of the overproduction that would be stimulated, prices would be lower. Because there is more support, it would encourage more production. So there will be more participation at lower prices which means the gap is not going to be assumed by the marketplace, and is not going to be assumed by the farmers who will bear the price of producing too much that the world markets do not want.

□ 2100

The gap is going to be paid by the American taxpayer.

We already know that our estimates from a year ago are probably at least $12 billion understated, and it is very likely as time goes on, as we find out all the little provisions that are in this bill, as the media is exploring new protections for lentils and chick-peas, as it is clear that we are going to have a new transitional payment on top of what we are doing for peanuts to try to pay them to move into the future, that there is going to be additional costs that are buried. This Congress had a chance to draw a line and establish some reasonable limits and caps.

I mentioned earlier that there was an effort on the part of the Senate, and I tip my hat to Senator HARKIN. I appreciate the strong voice that has been offered by Senator LUGAR to try to focus on ways to reign this in. The gentlemen had different approaches, but they were moving in the right direction. The House had limits of $450,000. We stepped forward, my colleague, the gentleman from the State of Michigan (Mr. SMITH) in particular, it was a great pleasure to work with him, carried this measure to the floor, and we were able to find support for the Senate cap of $275,000, but unfortunately the House in its wisdom was not able to persuade its own conferees to listen to it, and they fell back on a system that is going to raise the limits to $360,000 and have exemptions that are going to render that largely meaningless for very large producers, defeating the intent of the House.

We have, to be sure, some areas of this bill that deal with conservation that look on the surface positive. This is something that was pushed on the floor of the House. There was a very strong vote that came very close to passing that would have, when it was here in its original form, have cut 15 percent of the commodity payments and shifted them into conservation. There was a successful measure that I was pleased to cosponsor with the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) that took a couple percent of the commodities to deal with rural development, with conservation, with planning. The message got through a little bit that conservation was at least in some small way going to have to be addressed. There is what appears on paper to be a 79 percent increase, although it is only $20 billion. But unlike the commodity payments, where you open the spigot and the payments go out and the only condition is how many people participate and how low

the prices go and how much of a gap the taxpayer pays, that is automatic. Conservation is authorized, but it requires each year an appropriation, and as we continue to hemorrhage red ink, as we have gone from, in a little over a year, thanks to the blueprint that the President advanced and some of our Republican colleagues here embraced with massive tax cuts, the slowdown in the economy, the massive increase in the farm bill, increase in defense, you name it, we are spending a great deal of money on seemingly everything except what we promised in the last election, like prescription drug coverage for senior citizens. We have gone in a little over a year from the greatest projected surplus in our history to now looking at borrowing about a trillion and a half dollars from Social Security, driving up over a trillion dollars of additional interest payment.

In the face of these escalating costs, increased red ink, and what are going to be increased agricultural payments through the commodities, do we think we are going to get fully funded the environmental requirements? I think not. I think as a practical matter, these being backloaded, as they will, means that we are not going to see all of the money that is in fact authorized.

There are other rather perverse twists in this story that end up looking bad for the environment. We have got the great Environmental Quality Incentives Program which helped livestock producers clean up their waste. This is an important program. For this program and others like this that would have helped people with small scale operations, there were some 200,000 unmet claims that averaged about $9,000. There was a current limit of $10,000 under these claims.

Well, as we started going through this process in Congress this year, we did not speak to putting more money into that program, keeping the funding level even. The House argued in the bill that came through here that we would raise those limits to $50,000. The Senate argued, well, just $30,000. Either way, it was going to be a great increase in payments to larger operations.

When it came time for the conference, the Washington Post had a great line, I wish I could quote it exactly, but we had the $50,000 that the House wanted, the Senate would cap it at $30,000, and instead of splitting the difference, they added it together and raised the limit to $75,000, and then allowed large operators to get 6 years payments in 1 year, raising it effectively to $450,000, subsidizing the extreme largest operations, depleting scarce resources, making it less likely that the people that are out there now, the smaller operations, remember, I mentioned they average just $9,000 in payments, we had a couple hundred thousand of them that were not met because there was not adequate funding. But by raising the levels for the largest operations, we are going to make it even less likely that they get what they want, and there is going to be more that is going to be bled off to the largest operations.

Well, sadly, that is very much the case with how these subsidies work. As a result of this farm bill, we are going to see half the benefits flow to only six States. The majority of them, the vast majority, are going to go to producers of 13 commodities. Two-thirds of the subsidies will go to 3 percent of the farmers, most with annual incomes over $250,000 a year. It is estimated that the top 10 percent of these 2 million family farms are going to get close to three-quarters of the total benefit. It means in a State like mine, in Oregon, the pattern is exceedingly frustrating.

I have heard from agricultural interests who would like some help. But in our State, like most of the agriculture in this country, it is not unique in my State, we deal a lot with nuts and berries, the specialty crops, the orchards. These people are off on their own. They do not get the support. Oregon gets a small fraction of the agricultural subsidy in terms of the national average, far less than the big producers of the commodities. Illustrating the perverse nature of it, one-quarter of the entire Federal subsidy for the last 6 years in Oregon went to one small county that just happened to grow wheat.

We are, I am sad to say, Mr. Speaker, dealing with a situation today where our agricultural policy is going to continue to be concentrating benefits to a few. We are going to continue to lose family farms. Small family-scale operations are going to be forced out of business, on one side by increased urbanization. Their neighbors are encroaching on them as sprawl moves into their backyard. We do not have adequate protections.

As the costs of compliance with the environment continue to go up, small operations are not going to get their fair share. We are going to be concentrating benefits to the largest producers, which means that they can produce even more, which is going to drive down the prices for everybody. They are going to get a larger subsidy, they are going to have the money to buy out the smaller producers, and we are going to continue this cycle, losing family farms, concentrating the benefits of the Federal taxpayer on fewer and fewer farmers who are more and more disconnected from the market.

It is bad for the environment, it is bad for people who care about the humane treatment of animals, it is bad for people who want to protect against the incursion of suburban sprawl, it is bad for people who care about having the rich diversity of farm product in terms of vegetables, in terms of nuts, berries, specialty crops, that could make such a difference in so many parts of the country.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it is appropriate for us to start envisioning a new future for agriculture in this country. First and foremost, we have to stop the lunacy of subsidizing people to grow things that the market does not want, disconnecting them from a responsibility to the environment, rewarding larger and larger scale operations, while we say we are supporting small operations.

We need to make sure that our payments go to farmers across the country, not to grow particular things that we do not need, but to behave in ways that we as a society value; pay them to protect water quality; pay them to be stewards of the land; pay them to respect this buffer between urban and rural areas; pay them to preserve, not develop their land, or protecting scenic easements. There are a wide range of areas that the public desires that would not interfere with our trade policies, that would actually save money for things like water quality and flooding, and that would make sense in terms of what we say our stated values are.

Second, I think it is important that we work to reconnect people with their food supply. There is an explosion around the country of farmers' markets. We have a half a dozen in my community. I am going to go to a neighborhood in Portland where they are celebrating the opening of yet another farmers' market. They are in Milwaukee, in Gresham, in Beaverton. We are seeing farmers' markets in Washington, D.C. There are half a dozen of them here in our Nation's Capital, and all around the country.

This is an opportunity for people to connect with local production. It tends to be a higher quality product. People are connecting with the folks that actually produce it. They cut out the middleman or woman so that they deal direct. It is more profitable to them. It just makes good sense. There are extraordinarily thoughtful people that are thinking about ways to apply these principles more broadly.

□ 2115

Alice Waters in Berkeley, California with the famous restaurant, Chez Panisse, has a vision of being able to have the children in that school district be able to be a part of knowing where the food comes from and, in some cases, actually growing it and preparing it. They can be part of the educational process, and make for healthier, as well as smarter, kids. There is burgeoning activities of community gardens in urban agriculture; the slow food movement, organic. There are people who are taking a hard look at meat production in this country. I have talked earlier about the health benefits of having, whether it is the free-range chicken, or the grass-fed cattle, or the hogs that are not in confined factory farm operations. It is more humane, it is healthy, it has properties that those who are qualified to comment suggest that it is better in terms of flavor, texture; it is a better value for consumers, and it is produced in a more humane fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have reached a point where I hope this agriculture bill was sort of the high water mark for low water politics; where we felt that if we throw enough money at enough little interest groups, a little bit for dairy here, a little bit for apples over there, lentils, peanuts, if we give a tiny increase in the food support for school lunch and for nutrition programs, for food stamps, which actually were a very small increase, but an increase nonetheless, that somehow we could sort of balance things out and get that legislation passed.

Well, I hope this is the last gasp of a system that is bad for the environment, bad for the economy, bad for the health of the American public; that is clearly a bad signal for those who care about international trade. We are only 4.7 percent of the world's population. There is 95.3 percent out there that are potential markets, and we are sure sending a very negative signal to them. I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that we will no longer stand for shortchanging the environment, sidestepping animal welfare issues, and turning fundamental fairness on its head.

It was interesting to watch. As this bill worked its way through Congress, we were able to see a chorus that was formed by newspapers. Virtually all of the editorial writers around the country, the Times, the Post, the Wall Street Journal, conservatives and liberals alike; we saw environmentalists join with fiscal conservatives. The vast majority of farmers in this country who were shortchanged, there is a consensus emerging, there is a coalition that is possible. And if, and if, this unfortunate bill serves to unite these forces for better agricultural and environmental policy, perhaps in some way, it will be worth it.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks this evening. But first, I wanted to just add a brief comment about what we have seen with the administration dealing with the declaration that air traffic control is no longer going to be an inherently governmental act. A number of my colleagues earlier in the evening took to the floor to express deep reservations about that, and I must join them. I find great irony at a time when finally Congress and the administration have given the American public what they wanted in terms of federalization and professionalization of baggage inspection, but the administration would somehow conclude that the sensitive, critical function of air traffic control is no longer essential, and we can just sort of farm that out to the lowest bidder and throw that into chaos.

We saw what those dedicated men and women did on September 11, landing 5,000 planes in 100 minutes, maybe a little more, without incident, smoothly, under great stress. We have seen this in my community where people have undertaken problems with malfunctioning equipment, be able to rise to the occasion. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, with hundreds of thousands of situations across this country every day, I do not want us to be rolling the dice with some sort of evolutionary effort and the conclusion that this is not an inherent governmental function. I think we have only to look at the very rocky performance in Great Britain, in Canada, problems in Australia. This is not an area that we need to go at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I am hopeful that we are not going to engage in another battle here that is I think going to doom us to hopefully just get back to ground zero; I guess that is an ill-advised term; I did not mean it in that context, but just get us back to where we are today at best. We cannot afford to waste that time, that energy, and the expertise of these dedicated men and women.

I see my colleague from Texas is here. I serve with him on the Committee on Transportation. I know he has deep concerns about the integrity of our air transport system, and I would yield to him if he would wish to comment.

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Oregon.

Mr. Speaker, safety is the issue and it is the only issue, and as has been indicated by the gentleman from Oregon, identifying the low bid is not. The administration's executive order stating that air traffic control is not an inherently governmental function is totally misguided and it is another slap in the face at our hard-working, dedicated Federal employees, and it places in jeopardy the safety of the American traveling public. The President's senior staff has stated the administration has been considering privatizing the operation of the Nation's air traffic control system. That would be a huge, costly, and dangerous mistake. If ensuring the safety of our Nation's skies is not inherently governmental, then I would like to know what is.

Currently, public employees make sure our streets are safe, they make sure our coastline is secure, our borders are protected, so why does the administration believe that public employees should not ensure the safety of our skies?

As has been indicated by the gentleman from Oregon, the events of September 11 proved how important it was to have experienced staff in our control towers. They brought down 5,000 planes in less than 2 hours without any problem. Our Nation's controllers were able to do this because they are highly trained professionals whose only mission is safety.

We do not need to turn this job over and the safety of our friends over to the lowest bidder. It seems that the administration is intent on contracting out critical government responsibilities to the lowest bidder. That is not a savings. In our current environment, we face countless unknown threats. We need people in our government whose first mission, whose only mission, is security and safety, not corporate profits. The administration states that private systems would be more cost-effective; they would be more efficient. Recent examples in Great Britain, Canada, and New Zealand have proven just the opposite. The administration offers no reason for this order and can provide no justification for privatizing air traffic control. Managing air traffic control services is not a for-profit business and should not be run like one. The bottom line is safety; the bottom line is not profits.

As a member of the Subcommittee on Aviation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I listened to countless hours of testimony, along with the gentleman from Oregon, detailing the complete disregard for safety and security with which private airport screening firms operate. After much deliberation and over the House Republican leadership's objections, the vast majority of this Congress determined that the screeners, given their importance to aviation and national security, should be Federal employees.

Now, the administration wants to strip air traffic control functions from public employees and contract it out to the lowest bidder. We should not promote someone whose only criteria is the lowest bid.

Our professional controllers require years of complex and comprehensive training. Does the administration really expect private companies to make this substantial investment in human capital? Our air traffic control system is the envy of the entire world. It handles more traffic and manages the most congested airspace in the entire world. The men and women who operate this system are among the finest employees the government has. The country is facing a crisis in air traffic control. Thousands of controllers will be retiring soon, and Congress needs to adopt policies that will keep these talented, hard-working people as controllers for as long as possible. We should not be adopting policies driving these dedicated people from service.

On its very face, this action by the administration flies in the face of reason. The President's action has no justification, except to serve business at the expense of the traveling public. We need to focus on the safety of American travelers, not on profits to the lowest bidder.

Ask yourselves this: Just how important are the lives of your family? Do you really want to trust them to the lowest bidder?

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's insightful comments. If I may just direct a question to the gentleman. The gentleman serves on the subcommittee which has been dealing with some of the most critical areas of air safety in our country. I know it has been accelerated here in the last 9 months. I am curious if the gentleman has had any evidence that has been presented to the subcommittee, or if the administration

heretofore had brought forth any indication that there were problems with our air traffic system that merited this drastic action and the conclusion that air traffic control was not an inherently governmental function.

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, the administration, as the gentleman from Oregon who also serves on the committee knows, has brought forth absolutely no testimony, no evidence of any sort showing that there is a need to move this from a governmental function into a private function. In fact, if the gentleman wants to follow the reasoning presented to the committee, it is exactly the opposite. If we want to say that the private companies were not doing a good job of screening the baggage and we agreed to move that into a governmental function with government employees because of the danger presented to the traveling public, why then should we move the opposite way and say our extremely efficient, well-trained and hard-working government employees that keep our skies safe, that are the envy of the entire world? Why should we move that from a position of government trust where we are protecting the public into the lowest bidder, the person that comes in that says, I can do it the cheapest would be the person that would get the job. I think the American public deserves more than that, and I think the administration needs to bring testimony or evidence to show why the cheapest instead of the best should get the bid.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's analysis. I was struck; I was here earlier in the evening when the gentleman gave eloquent testimony to the need to support our rail investment. The gentleman talked about what a difference it made in east Texas, how people had moved forward, how Texas has had ridership increase on the order of 9 percent where the State had been investing, where the private sector had been there. The gentleman was talking about the legislation that we have worked on in our Subcommittee on Railroads of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, under bipartisan leadership of the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. CLEMENT), the ranking minority member; the chairman, the gentleman from Buffalo, New York (Mr. QUINN), the Republican chair, that has been virtually unanimous on the part of our committee to move forward to keep on track. I was struck with what the gentleman was talking about in terms of supporting that and the need to move forward with our bipartisan consensus to protect Amtrak, with the absolute failure to work with the committee structure, to look at the evidence and come forward with a program that made sense for the American public. I thought that the contrast between the gentleman's two comments, one, the importance of preserving what the committee could do on behalf of rail, contrasted with what had not happened with air traffic control and safety, was stunning.

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, there is no one in the United States Congress who has done more for rail or to focus the attention of Congress and the administration on rail than my good friend from Oregon, and I know it fits in well with his livable communities agenda and trying to save energy and having a complete travel and infrastructure system of rail and air and water and otherwise.

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I think it is important, as the gentleman mentioned, that as we are trying to protect one sort of transportation, as we are trying to say, let us invest in rail, let us do something to make it safer, let us use rail as a viable alternative, that at the same time we are backing away from aviation; and we are saying, we have a system that works, we have a system with professional folks, we have a system that brought down 5,000 planes in 2 hours with no problems, we have the envy of the world; but we want to change that.

We want to strip these professionals, these Federal employees that have only safety, that is their only criteria, we want to strip them of that responsibility, and we want to put it out on the market to a private company who says, How can I cut costs? How can I pay as little as possible to these employees? How can I make sure they do not have benefits? What can I do to get this so low and so stripped down and so poorly administered that I will get that contract? Because they look at it as profit, and our government employees that have worked so hard and trained so hard look at it as an obligation to safety for the traveling public, to safety as part of our national security. Certainly, since September 11, we need to look at rail and air and help them, not do something to back away from our obligation.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's leadership and eloquence in summarizing that. I do not say it any better.

THE REPUBLICAN PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KELLER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. FLETCHER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. FLETCHER. Mr. Speaker, it is truly a privilege to be here this evening representing the leadership, the Republican leadership, on a very, very critical issue.

Let me go back in time just briefly and look at when Medicare was first developed. We know that has been one of the most successful programs for our seniors, for their retirement security, for their health. Certainly it has been extremely successful.

But since that time, medicine has changed tremendously. It has moved from a system that primarily was focused on acute care. In other words, if you had a problem, if you had a disease diagnosed, if you needed surgery, you went to the hospital, to the physician, and that was cared for. It was acute care.

Medicine has transitioned tremendously since we first established Medicare. Medicare needs to be enhanced and improved and strengthened to meet those changes.

Now, the Republican Party has already, over the last few years, certainly begun that change as we have increased some of the efforts toward diagnosis of early disease and screening of disease, and also on prevention, particularly in areas like diabetes, which certainly represents a tremendous problem in this Nation. Hopefully, through our increased funding of not only Medicare but NIH, we will find cures for these diseases.

But we have already begun to move Medicare into an enhanced, improved program and strengthened it. Now, tonight, we would like to talk about prescription drugs. I think it is probably the most critical issue facing the United States and the health care, certainly, of our seniors, so it is certainly an honor for me to be able to be part of the Speaker's task force addressing this issue. Let me just review it briefly.

First off, this program focuses and will provide coverage for all seniors. Every senior who is eligible for Medicare will be eligible for this program, and this program will cover them. It has been estimated about 95 percent of those seniors will take advantage of this.

The other thing, it would provide immediate help, help right now: a 30 percent estimated reduction of drug costs, prescription drug costs, immediately. This is an up-front discount that will take effect immediately on the bill passing not only the House but the Senate and being sent to the President's desk, where he certainly is very much in favor of this.

It is voluntary, and it provides at least two choices guaranteed to every senior. It cannot be taken away. It is not like a program that some others are offering on the Democratic side that would be sundowned or sunsetted. This program will not be able to be taken away. It has the same provisions and the same assurance guaranteed by the U.S. Government as Medicare and as Social Security.

One thing, it also has provisions to ensure our seniors do not have to choose between food and prescription drugs. Certainly, I have seen that occur, and I will talk about that a little later. For those on fixed incomes, it certainly is critical that we provide this help to those.

It also protects people from the bankruptcy of runaway drug costs. We have a lot of wonderful new medications that help tremendously, but the