

vouchers into Homeownership Vouchers. I am happy to say that the VSHA Homeownership program has enabled low-income Vermonters to build equity and wealth while increasing their civic involvement.

While providing housing for Vermonters, the VSHA has simultaneously preserved and revitalized town centers, historical buildings and a general sense of community across the State. They have done this with commendable collaboration with nonprofit organizations, the private sector and various government agencies. I have seen their work, and most importantly, I have seen the tremendous impact their programs have had on my home State and the people who call the Green Mountains their home.

I congratulate the VSHA on their outstanding achievements over the past 40 years. On behalf of the people of Vermont, I applaud everyone who has worked to make the Vermont State Housing Authority a great success.

#### EMERGENCY EXTENDED UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION ACT

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise in support of H.R. 5749, Emergency Extended Unemployment Compensation Act. Earlier this month we were met with troubling news about our economy. We learned that the unemployment rate, one of the strongest indicators of our Nation's economic health, experienced the largest one month increase since 1986, from 5 percent to 5.5 percent.

In real terms, this jump in the unemployment rate means that between April and May, 49,000 more American workers lost their jobs. In 2008, our economy has lost a total of 324,000 jobs.

In my State of California, the unemployment rate is the third highest in the Nation at 6.2 percent. Some areas in California's Central Valley have unemployment rates as high as 10 to 12 percent.

Families in these communities are struggling in this economy, and with Governor Schwarzenegger's recently declared a drought emergency in the Central Valley, farmers there tell me that because of the water shortage, fewer acres will be planted this year, which will mean fewer jobs in this area of the State with already skyrocketing unemployment.

Yet in this time of economic uncertainty, when so many workers can't make ends meet because they have lost their jobs, Senate Republicans today did as they have done so many times this year on issues important to American families and said "no" to passing a stand-alone unemployment benefits extension bill.

This bill, passed with strong bipartisan support by the House, could have been sent to the President immediately so that unemployed workers who have exhausted their unemployment benefits can get additional support while they try and find a new job.

Opponents of this bill wrongly suggest that extending benefits for an additional period of time in high unemployment States creates a disincentive for unemployed workers to seek a job. This flawed logic is not only demeaning to hard-working Americans, it also ignores the reality for job seekers pounding the pavement in today's economy.

Unemployed workers are out looking for new jobs, but because of the economic downturn, there are fewer and fewer opportunities to find work. Today there are only 3.7 million existing job opportunities for 8.5 million unemployed workers.

In addition, the long-term unemployment rate is 62 percent higher than it was in January of 2001, when our country was in a recession. This means that more and more unemployed workers are running out of benefits before finding new jobs.

In California, over 50 percent of newly unemployed workers are exhausting their benefits before finding a new job.

Californians are also struggling to deal with rising fuel and food costs, making it even more difficult for the 324,000 Americans who have lost their jobs this year to provide for their families.

We learned today that the national gas price average increased yet again to \$4.08, up \$1.07 from last year.

Prices for food staples like bread and eggs are up as high as 20 percent from last year.

Food banks and soup kitchens, like the Alameda County Food Bank in California, are seeing demand for food aid grow as much as 40 percent over last year, with the increase in visits a direct result of the high unemployment rate.

Senate Democrats know that we must act now to provide additional relief to workers who have exhausted their benefits and in areas of the country with high unemployment.

This bill would immediately provide up to 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits in every state to workers who have exhausted the 26 weeks of regular unemployment benefits.

Workers in States with higher levels of unemployment, like California, would be eligible for 26 weeks of extended benefits.

This bill will also provide an additional stimulus to the Nation's economy. Leading economists tell us that for every dollar the Federal Government spends on unemployment benefits, it adds \$1.64 to the national gross domestic product.

We know that people out of work use extended unemployment benefits to meet the essential needs of their families, to buy groceries and to pay bills. With the much-needed resources this bill provides, jobless workers will help inject money into the lagging economy.

This bill is a win for struggling families and a win for the Nation's econ-

omy, and it is unfortunate that Senate Republicans refused to work with us to consider this important legislation.

#### SELECT AGENT PROGRAM AND BIOSAFETY IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I rise today in support of S. 3127, the Select Agent Program and Biosafety Improvement Act of 2008. Last week, I introduced this important legislation with my friend Senator TED KENNEDY. I thank my colleague from Massachusetts for his partnership. I enjoyed working closely with him in the 109th Congress on the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, which was signed into law in December 2006. He continues to be one of the great leaders in the U.S. Senate and I look forward to continuing to work with him to ensure our laws protect the American people from health threats of all kinds.

S. 3127 will enhance our Nation's biosecurity and improve the biosafety of our most secure laboratories. The bill achieves two overarching goals.

First, it reauthorizes and improves the Select Agent Program. This program was created in the 1990s to control the transfer of certain dangerous biological agents and toxins that could be used for bioterrorism. The program expanded after the anthrax attacks in 2001; however, the authorization expired at the end of September 2007.

Second, the bill evaluates and enhances the safety and oversight of high containment laboratories. These laboratories are used by scientists to study select agents and other infectious materials. Labs are categorized by their safety level. There are four levels, termed Biosafety Level, BSL, 1 through 4, with 4 being the highest level. The number of these labs has grown, both domestically and internationally, in the last several years. Recent incidents in which laboratory workers were exposed to disease agents have highlighted the need to evaluate ways to improve the safety of these labs.

The Select Agent Program is jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services', HHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's, USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS. The program was intended to prevent terrorism, and protect public and animal health and safety, while not hampering legitimate research. This is an obvious struggle that requires careful consideration, particularly when science is rapidly advancing around the globe.

Under the USA PATRIOT Act, it is illegal to possess "select agents" for reasons other than legitimate research. The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 further required laboratories and laboratory personnel to undergo background checks by the FBI prior to approval for possession of select