

this Congress, who talks about the environment, who gets involved in environmental issues all over this Nation, indeed the world, now be willing to stand up for the environment in our own soil that is crossing the border and start backing up our well-intentioned rhetoric with real action that will make sure that 18th sand castle competition in Imperial Beach is one that is clean, sunny and happy for both sides of the border.

□ 1430

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE FARM LIFE EXTENSION ACT OF 1998

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, today, earlier today, along with the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) and the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) I introduced legislation called the Flex Act, the Farm Life Extension Act of 1998.

Many people across this country are becoming more and more aware of the very serious problem that we have in agriculture today. For those who do not live in farm States, I would urge them to take a look at some recent newspaper stories, like the one on the Sunday New York Times front page which talks about the need for assistance for South Dakota and other agricultural producers across this country. And, if one looks and drives across any of those States today, you will see a lot of for sale signs, you will see a lot of auctions, because there are a lot of people who are going out of business, and in fact, if you will listen very closely, you will hear a lot of tales about the slow death, the last gasping breath, of agriculture as prices continue to plummet and producers are asked more and more to realize their incomes from the marketplace. And when asking them to do that with the 1996 farm bill, the Freedom to Farm Act, we indicated to them that we would be more aggressive in seeking export markets and opportunities for their agricultural commodities, and in fact we have not followed through on that end of the deal, and today I want to call on the administration to further use the tools that have been provided, the Export Enhancement Program that has been authorized and funded by the Congress to help our agricultural producers compete on a level playing field with those other producers around the world.

And, in fact, the American farmer can compete with anyone, but the American farmer cannot compete on a level playing field with taxpayers in places like Germany and France and other countries around the world that subsidize their farm economies. We have to be more aggressive in terms of seeking market opportunities for our agricultural producers. That is a long

term issue, and if we are going to see prices stabilize in the long run and to increase the prices that our producers derive they marketplace, we have to realize that 96 percent of the world's population in fact lives outside the United States, and that is where the future markets for agriculture are.

At the same time we have a more immediate problem in agriculture today. We have a cash flow problem. Because prices are so low, we have farmers who are in a world of hurt across this country. It is probably more pronounced in my part of the world, up in the northern plain States, but it is starting to creep out into the other States across this country, and I think one of the things that we are finding is that, if the agricultural sector of our economy is weak, our country is weak, and we have to have a healthy agricultural economy in order to have a strong America.

And so today, in introducing this legislation, we have sought to bring some badly needed capital, some cash flow assistance, to farmers across this country. Very simply what it does is takes the existing payments that they would already receive under the Freedom to Farm Act and allow them to take them in one lump sum today, and in so doing it gives them additional flexibility, allows them to make a management and a business decision about whether or not to accelerate and receive those payments today, perhaps pay down debt, perhaps even get out of the business, if that is their choice, but at least allows them to better manage the resources that we have provided under the farm policy in this country for the next 5 years. And our bill is a way of doing that.

In fact, we have come up with a mechanism whereby that can be financed. If, in fact, you put the 5-year payments, bring them back to net present value today and allow the farmers to accept that, you have an appropriation problem up front, you do not effect budget authority. But to address that what we have done is borrowed on a concept that was used in the State of South Dakota with the conservation reserve program, and that is to allow Farmer Mac in this case to bond and to take the proceeds from those bonds to purchase the contracts and then, as those contracts come due, purchase the contracts from the farmers, get the cash out there, and then as those contracts come due, USDA would reimburse Farmer Mac and thereby eliminate the immediate need for up-front assistance for appropriations.

And that is basically the way that this bill works and the concept that is embodied in it, and it is something again that I hope we can use and implement that will bring additional cash flow relief to a lot of agricultural producers in this country.

And just earlier today we announced, along with the Speaker and the chairman of the agricultural committee, Mr. BOB SMITH, a short-term assistance

which would advance the payment that they will receive, the '99 Freedom to Farm payment, to October 1 this year, \$5.5 billion going out to agricultural producers this year rather than next, giving them again the immediate cash flow assistance that they need to make those payments that are due at the bank and other places.

And I appreciate very much the leadership of our committee and the leadership of this House have taken to address this serious problem in rural America, and so I credit the leadership and look forward to working with them to enact not only that bill, but the Flex Act of 1998.

#### APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H.R. 1853, CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Without objection the Chair appoints the following conferees on H.R. 1853, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Amendments of 1997:

For consideration of the House bill and the Senate amendment and modifications committed to conference:

Messrs. GOODLING,  
MCKEON,  
RIGGS,  
PETERSON of Pennsylvania,  
SAM JOHNSON of Texas,  
CLAY,  
MARTINEZ,  
and KILDEE.

There was no objection.

#### SHARE THE PROSPERITY BY INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, the House is galloping toward recess and adjournment. The Republicans have had a very clever strategy this year. We have spent a lot of time in recess and very little time in deliberations. That is not by accident, it is a way to guarantee that important things are done rapidly, that there is a minimum of deliberation, that the party and the minority does not have an opportunity to bring issues to the public. It has worked very well. You know, we have had a lot of very extreme things accomplished in a few days using this technique of minimizing deliberations and maximizing action while we are here.

So, I suspect the process of galloping is going to continue between now and the time we go out on the August recess, and, once we return from the August recess, of course the galloping is even going to even move faster.

The Republican schedule is part of the whole strategy, and what it does is it turns our democracy into a form of distorted law making, which is not