cannot be exploited in any fashion that would cause somebody to lose a job or lose the chance to be hired for a job because a foreign worker was being selected for that assignment.

So there are safeguards for workers. There are the long-range education and job training components and there is the temporary increase in the number of workers who can come into this country to meet the immediate crisis. It is a balanced approach. It is one that, I think, deserves our support.

In closing, let me say thanks to those in the administration with whom we have been working. But also I would like to thank a number of our colleagues who have worked with me throughout this process, including Senator HATCH, chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Senator GORTON, who has had a special interest in this for a variety of reasons relating to his interest in high-tech companies; the majority leader, who has been very supportive; Senator PHIL GRAMM, who worked with me on a number of the negotiations; Senator LIEBERMAN, who played a very active role throughout the process, both here in the Senate and in the recent deliberations; Senator BOB GRAHAM, who was an early and active supporter of this effort; and especially to the chairman of the Commerce Committee who worked with me as we moved this legislation forward, both here in the Senate and in the intervening timeframes. Senator MCCAIN, whose commitment to this type of an approach of making sure on a variety of fronts that America is ready to enter the digital age and the digital economy, has given the kind of leadership I think we all admire. I thank him especially for his efforts.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. MCCAIN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona is recognized.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, let me say that what the Senator from Michigan, Senator ABRAHAM, has described today is a signal event. I recently visited Silicon Valley, which politicians seem to be doing more and more of nowadays. I was told that there were two major priorities that they felt were critical to the future of their industry. One was this, what we know now as the H–1B visa bill, and the other is the Internet tax freedom bill.

Senator ABRAHAM took an issue, which very few believed we could, and turned it into reality. He worked with both sides of the aisle, with the White House, and with the Silicon Valley folks, as well as labor. I believe that he has come up with a remarkable package, a remarkable product, which will allow us to maintain the incredible high-tech lead we have in the world. Without the ability to have trained, qualified and educated people in this industry, obviously we cannot have as predictable a future as we would like.

A part of this bill, Mr. President, will be the National Science Foundation Scholarship Program for Science and Math. At the appropriate time, I will offer language to name these scholarships the ''Spencer Abraham Scholarship Program.''

Again, I congratulate Senator ABRAHAM, because what he has achieved in this time of labeling the Congress as a ''do-nothing Congress,'' very frankly, is the best example of working on both sides of the aisle and with the administration for the good of the Nation. I hope that many of the rest of us, including this Senator, will follow his example.

I also hope we will be able to take up the Internet Tax Freedom Act so that we can also get that legislation passed before we leave.

I note the presence of Senator DORGAN on the floor. I thank him for his patience. I yield the floor.

Mr. DORGAN addressed the Chair.

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

WENDELL H. FORD NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 3628

(Purpose: To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an investment credit to promote the availability of jet aircraft to underserved communities, to reduce the passenger tax rate on rural domestic flight segments, and for other purposes)

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from North Dakota [Mr. DORGAN] proposes an amendment numbered 3628.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Amendments Submitted.'')

Mr. DORGAN. I have indicated that I will offer two amendments to this piece of legislation. This would be the first. I intend, however, not to seek a vote on this amendment. I intend to ask unanimous consent that it be withdrawn. I am offering it for this reason. This legislation provides tax credits under certain circumstances. I recognize that it would cause a blue slip on this bill because this tax legislation must originate in the House of Representatives. I do not intend or want to cause that kind of problem for this bill, but I believe very strongly that this amendment is part of the solution to a very large problem we have, and I introduce it today for the purpose of describing to my colleagues an approach that I would intend to offer to some future tax legislation that will be considered by the Senate and the House.

Mr. President, the chairman of the subcommittee—excuse me, chairman of the full committee—I have demoted him—the chairman of the full committee, Senator MCCAIN, and the ranking member, Senator FORD, have brought a bill to the floor of the Senate that is very important.

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for just one moment.

Mr. DORGAN. I will be happy to yield.

Mr. FORD. We have worked out Senator REED's amendment. I know the Senator does not want to lose his train of thought here, but Senator REED has an important engagement, and I know Senator DORGAN does, too. This one will take about 2 minutes.

I ask unanimous consent that this amendment be set aside and that we recognize Senator REED, and that at the end of Senator REED's amendment we return, then, to Senator DORGAN's amendment.

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

The distinguished Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

AMENDMENT NO. 3629

(Purpose: To provide for the expenditure of certain unobligated funds for noise abatement discretionary grants)

Mr. REED. I thank the Chair.

First, let me thank Senator DORGAN for his graciousness in allowing me to present my amendment and also thank Senator MCCAIN and Senator FORD for their understanding and cooperation.

I have an amendment at the desk which I call up now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. REED] proposes an amendment numbered 3629.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

At the appropriate place in title II, insert the following:

SEC. 2 . DISCRETIONARY GRANTS.

Notwithstanding any limitation on the amount of funds that may be expended for grants for noise abatement, if any funds made available under section 48103 of title 49, United States Code, remain available at the end of the fiscal year for which those funds were made available, and are not allocated under section 47115 of that title, or under any other provision relating to the awarding of discretionary grants from unobligated funds made available under section 48103 of that title, the Secretary of Transportation may use those funds to make discretionary grants for noise abatement activities.

Mr. REED. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, my amendment is a very straightforward attempt to find additional resources to help neighborhoods that surround airports and are confronting the problem of airport noise. My State of Rhode Island is home to one of the fastest growing airports in the country, T.F. Green Airport. Indeed, over the past two years,

T.F. Green has seen roughly an annual increase of 55 percent in passenger traffic. This is compared to a national average increase of 4 percent a year. So you can well appreciate that the impact of additional flights coming in has caused severe noise problems around the airport.

This has been a source of great strength, the growth of T.F. Green, in terms of our economy; it has brought visitors; it has become a gateway to New England. It has created jobs. All of these are extremely positive. But it has also generated increased noise with increased numbers of flights. The Rhode Island Airport Corporation, the city of Warwick, and community groups are working together. We have been successful in securing grants from the FAA for noise abatement. But I think we have to do much more to ensure that all the homes that need soundproofing with all of the techniques that we can use to mitigate and minimize noise are effectively employed to assist the people of Rhode Island.

I am very pleased with what has already been done in this legislation. Both Senator MCCAIN and Senator FORD have taken a very strong, positive step to ensure that we are sensitive to the noise problem at airports. This legislation includes a set-aside for noise abatement of approximately 35 percent rather than the 31 percent in the bill that has been passed by the other body. This is a very, very positive development, but I think we can do more. I would also be very supportive of Senator MCCAIN and Senator FORD's efforts to maintain that 35 percent set-aside.

What my amendment does is simply lift the existing cap on the total amount of funds that the FAA may spend on noise abatement when the FAA distributes unexpended funds at the end of a fiscal year. This, we hope, would allow for additional resources to be devoted towards noise abatement. It would be consistent with and within the confines and framework of the existing appropriations bills. It is a modest, but I think very important step forward to help address the problem of noise around airports.

I, indeed, am very pleased that Senator MCCAIN and Senator FORD have taken such a strong step in this bill to protect airport neighborhoods from the increased level of noise.

With this, I urge passage of the amendment.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I urge adoption of the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). If there is no further debate, without objection, the amendment is agreed to.

The Amendment (No. 3629) was agreed to.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. FORD. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. FORD. I thank the Senator, and I particularly thank Senator DORGAN for allowing us to move this amendment along.

AMENDMENT NO. 3628

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, as I was saying, the amendment that I have offered to the FAA bill is an amendment that is very important to the country and especially to my region of the country. Just before I yielded the floor, I was talking about the leadership of Senator MCCAIN and Senator FORD. I think they have both done a wonderful job with this piece of legislation. It is an important piece of legislation for the country's sake, and it now appears that we will get this through the Senate and probably be completed with the legislation today, and that will be in no small measure due to their tenacity and their skill at crafting and moving this piece of legislation.

Let me describe what I intend to do with this amendment, and I will not talk about the second amendment which I intend to offer later today and hope that that will be approved by the Senate.

In late August, Northwest Airlines had a pilot strike and therefore a shutdown of their airline service. That might not have meant much to some. In some airports, I assume Northwest was one of a number of carriers that was serving certain airports and serving passengers. But in North Dakota, the State which I represent, Northwest Airlines was the only airline providing jet service to my State. That is a very different picture than the last time we had an airline strike, which was over 25 years ago.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago when Northwest had another strike and a shutdown prior to deregulation of the airlines, we had five different airline companies flying jets into the State of North Dakota—five different jet carriers in North Dakota. And then we had folks in Congress saying, you know what we really need to do to foster competition? We need to deregulate the airline industry. And so we deregulated the airline industry. I wasn't here at the time. But we deregulated them and we went from five jet carriers in North Dakota to one.

So I am thinking to myself, all those folks who are choking on the word ''competition,'' we need to deregulate so we stimulate more competition, where are they now so they can really choke on the word ''competition''? We have much less competition in airlines today, much less competition with a couple of exceptions.

If you live in Chicago and you are flying to New York or Los Angeles, God bless you, because you are going to have a lot of carriers to choose from and you are going to find very inexpensive ticket prices, and you can make a choice of carriers and ticket prices that are very attractive to you. You live in a city with millions and millions of people and you want to fly to another city with millions and millions of people. Guess what. This is not an awfully big deal for you; more choices and low fares. But you get beyond those cities and ask how has this airline deregulation affected other Americans, and what you will find is less selection, fewer choices, and higher prices.

North Dakota is just one example, but the most striking example—one airline with jet service. And on that night at midnight, when the strike was called and the airline shut down, just like that, an entire State lost all of its jet service.

What does that mean to a State? It begins to choke the economy very quickly. People can't move in and out. North Dakota is a sparsely populated State, 640,000 people. Up in the northern tier, we are 10 times the size of Massachusetts in land mass—big State, 640,000 people, and one airline serving with jets.

Now, I happen to think Northwest is a good carrier. I believe the same about all the major carriers. Most of them are well-run, good companies; they went through tough times, now are doing better, and I admire them.

What I do not admire is what they have done—retreating into regional monopolies in this country, retreating into hub and spoke so that they control the hub.

You go to any big area in this country and take a look at what they do. The major carriers have retreated so that they now, one company, will control 60 or 70 or 80 percent of all the gates at that airport. They control that hub. Do you think anybody is going to come in and take them on, anybody is going to come in and compete aggressively and say, ''Boy, this is a free market; we are going to go into your hub and we are going to compete against you?'' This is not happening. They cut the pie, created the slices, retreated into their little slices, and there is no competition. We now have regional monopolies without any regulation.

What sense does that make, to have monopolies without regulation? The minute I say ''regulation,'' we have people here having apoplectic seizures on the floor of the Senate. Oh, Lord, we should talk about regulation? I am not standing here today talking about regulation because I want to reregulate the airlines. All I want to do is see if we can provide some sort of industrial-strength vitamin B–12 shot right in the rump of those airlines to see if we cannot get them competing again. How do we do that? We do it by creating the conditions that require competition. This amendment is one.

Let us assume there is somebody out there who says, ''You know what I would like to do, I would like to run an airline. I have the money, I have the energy, I have the time, I have the skill. I want to create a regional airline, and I want to fly in an area where

nobody else is flying a jet, and I want to haul people to a major hub.''

They create their airline and fly to a major hub and they drop somebody off. And guess what. That somebody in most cases is going beyond that hub.

Let me give an example, of Bismarck going to Denver, which is a major hub. For 35 years, we had jet service with Frontier Airlines and then Continental, from Bismarck, ND, to Denver, a major hub. Now we do not. So a new company comes in and says, ''I will connect Bismarck to Denver, a major hub.'' But about 70 percent of the people leaving Bismarck are not going to just Denver, they are going beyond, to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Phoenix—you name it.

So this airline carrier starts up and hauls the Bismarck passengers to Denver and opens the door of the airplane, and they disembark on a sunny Denver day and discover they cannot go anywhere else, because if they walk over to United or another carrier, they don't have the opportunity to get a joint fare ticket. They charge them an arm and a leg. In fact, they even have trouble getting their baggage moved from one airline to another, because the big airlines do not want competition. They have their hub, they don't want anybody messing with it, and they certainly do not want these upstart regional airlines springing up, hauling people into their hub.

So what you have is a circumstance where there is deregulation of the airlines, and the major carriers have merged. There has been all this romance going on; they decided they like each other a lot. Pretty soon they are going to get married. They merge up, two airlines become one, and now we have five or six large airlines in this country because they like each other so much, and they have retreated into these regional monopolies because they don't want to compete with each other. They create their own hub and they create their own spokes and they say to those who want to start up, ''We are sorry but we are not interested.''

Having said all that, and that is a mouthful, and having said I admire the majors—most of them are good carriers and they have good management and they do what they do in their interest—there is their interest and then there is a parallel and sometimes not parallel public interest. In some cases it is not a parallel public interest, as the case where we have areas that used to be served and are now not served but could be served by a new carrier if only the majors would cooperate with those new carriers.

In order to encourage new startup regional jet service, I am proposing a 10 percent investment tax credit for regional jet purchases. That is, those startup companies that want to begin regional jet service to fly these new regional jets between certain cities and hubs that are not now served with regional jet service, we would say to them that we will help with a 10 percent investment tax credit on the purchase or lease of those regional jets. We will help because we want to provide incentives for the establishment of regional jet service once again in our country.

My legislation would require that they serve those markets for a minimum of 5 years. We have defined exactly what those underserved markets are. It is targeted, it makes good sense, and will stimulate investment in an activity that this country very much needs and an activity that the so-called free market now does not accommodate, because the free market is clogged. There is kind of an airline cholesterol here that clogs up the arteries, and they say, ''This is the way we work, these are our hubs, these are our spokes, and you cannot mess with them.''

My legislation simply says we would like to encourage areas that no longer have jet service but could support it. We would like to encourage companies that decide they want to come in and serve there to be able to purchase the regional jets and be able to initiate that kind of service.

My legislation has a second provision which reduces the airline ticket tax for certain qualified flights in rural America. This proposal also has a revenue offset so it would not be a net loser for the Federal budget.

Having described all that, the second amendment I am going to offer also addresses this in a different way. My hope is we could work to get that accepted. We have been working hard with a number of Members of the Senate to see if we cannot get that accepted.

I just want to make two more points.

We are not in a situation in rural areas of this country where we can just sit back and say what is going to happen to us is going to happen to us and there is nothing we can do about it. There are some, I suppose, who sit around and wring their hands and gnash their teeth and fret and sweat and say, ''I really cannot alter things very much, this is the way it is.''

The way it is is not satisfactory to the people of my State. It is not satisfactory to have only one jet carrier serving our entire State. Our State's transportation services and airline service, especially jet airline service, is an essential transportation service. It ought not be held hostage by labor problems or other problems of one jet carrier. We must have competition. If all of those in this Chamber who mean what they say when they talk about competition will weigh in here and say, ''Let's stand for competition, let's stand for the free market, let's try to help new starts, let's breed opportunities for broader based economic ownership and more competition in the airline industry,'' then I think we will have done something important and useful and good for States like mine and for many other rural States in this country.

Mr. President, as I indicated when I started, I will offer my second amendment later this afternoon, which I hope will be accepted, because the amendment I have just described and offered has a blue slip attached to it in the sense it would be objected to, because a revenue measure must begin in the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives—and I used to serve in the House and used to serve on the Ways and Means Committee, and we were fierce in our determination to make certain that committee always had original jurisdiction on those issues. I am willing to say I understand that. But I wanted my colleagues to be able to review this amendment in the RECORD, because if and when there is a piece of legislation dealing with tax issues later this year, it is my intention to see that this becomes part of that discussion.

With that, I ask unanimous consent my amendment be withdrawn.

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

The amendment (No. 3628) was withdrawn.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. DORGAN. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business.

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

THE FAMILY FARM CRISIS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, we are going to conference, I think, this afternoon or tomorrow on the agriculture appropriations bill. I want to make some comments so that those in this Chamber who believe what some are proposing to go to conference with is adequate will understand it is not adequate at all.

We have a farm crisis in our country that is as significant a crisis as we have had since perhaps the 1930s. As you know, farm prices have collapsed. The price of wheat has dropped nearly 60 percent. We have farmers facing a serious, serious problem, many of whom will not be able to continue farming next year.

That means that yard light someplace out in the country is going out, that family farm is losing their money, their farm, their hope, their dreams. This Congress has the capability to do something about it or it has the capability to ignore it.

We have had two votes here in the Senate to increase price supports to give family farmers some hope. Twice we have been turned back. We are going to have a third vote. I am not sure when that is going to happen. As soon as we have the opportunity to