

HELMS, SESSIONS, FAIRCLOTH, ALLARD, DEWINE, BROWNBACK, INHOFE, COATS, COLLINS, HUTCHISON, LOTT, COVERDELL, AKAKA, ASHCROFT, SANTORUM, BREAU, HAGEL, GRAMS, SPECTER, MCCONNELL, D'AMATO, HOLLINGS, and Senator SMITH from New Hampshire.

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

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I also have a list of organizations, religious organizations that have been supporting this bill and endorse this bill. I will name those for the record: Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Association of Evangelicals, the International Fellowship of Jews and Christians, the Christian Coalition, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Jewish Coalition, the American Jewish Community, the Catholic Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men's Institutes, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, United Methodist Church Women's Division, American Coptic Association, Episcopal Church, Advocates International, Traditional Values Coalition, Justice Fellowship, and B'nai B'rith International.

Mr. President, how much time remains on both sides on the bill?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The Senator from Oklahoma has 7½ minutes and the opposition has 75.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, several colleagues have requested time to speak. I also know we went a little bit later than anticipated. Most of the colleagues on my side of the aisle have spoken. I know Senator LIEBERMAN is returning to the floor momentarily and wishes to speak. So I reserve the remainder of time on our side and ask colleagues, if they wish to speak, to please come to the floor and do so. If not, we will be happy to accommodate requests of other colleagues who wish to speak as in morning business.

Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent we, Senator LIEBERMAN and I, have 5 minutes to speak prior to the vote tomorrow morning. That will be at 9:25.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAMS. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent I be allowed to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

#### SUPPORT OF THE AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I rise tonight to express my grave disappointment of President Clinton's decision to veto the 1998 Agriculture Appropriations conference report, which includes emergency relief for farmers around the country, like those farmers in the Red River Valley area of my home state of Minnesota, who are struggling against a combination of devastating factors.

Inclement weather, low prices, high market yields generally, and multiple years of wheat scab disease have converged to produce an atmosphere where even the best, most competitive farmers in Northwestern Minnesota are suffering.

This, despite the fact that the Market Transition Payments in the FAIR Act have provided our nation's producers with a much greater safety net than the deficiency payments they would have received under the old program—about \$7.5 billion more under the new farm bill than the old.

Yet the President's actions will delay this important relief. This bill provides twice as much assistance as he originally requested, yet he has now joined the bidding war, changed his mind and now jeopardizes this needed assistance to our farmers.

It is crucial for farmers in Minnesota, as well as other states, that the Agriculture Appropriations bill be signed by the President and not used as a pawn in a political debate. The bill funds all of our agriculture programs including \$675 million to Plains farmers to help offset crop failures, like those caused by the wheat scab epidemic.

It also includes \$1.65 billion which is to be added to the annual market transition payments—this money will help to address depressed commodity prices.

The conference report funds \$56 billion to fund needed agriculture programs. This includes funds for many crucial tools to help our farmers promote their commodities at home and throughout the world.

The bill funds the Farm Service Offices in our states to aid farmers in making the adjustment to Freedom to Farm.

It also funds the Foreign Agricultural Service, which promotes U.S. agriculture products abroad. The Service coordinates CCC Export Credit Guarantee Programs; PL-480; Export Enhancement; and the Market Access Program.

The bill will continue and expand needed assistance to farmers in the long term, as well as the short term. It is a good compromise. I voted for the conference report although there are sections that I, like many, oppose, such as language from an earlier House version which would create a backdoor extension of the Northeast Interstate

Dairy Compact. I raised some strong objections to this political maneuvering on the Senate floor last week.

It will allow an unjustifiable, reprehensible program to continue for another six months.

While I have deep reservations, this compromise is one we should continue to support and one the President should sign.

Some say this compromise does not include enough to address the farm crisis. Yet, this conference report provides over \$4.2 billion in farm relief money. This is money that will be available immediately to farmers.

This is in addition to the regular AMTA payments—that is the marketing transition support payments which have provided roughly \$17.5 billion to farmers over the last two years. This is also in addition to approximately \$4 billion that producers will receive in loan deficiency payments this year.

Both Democrat and Republican plans were debated thoroughly in Committee, and the plan before the President is the one that the Members decided to support. The concept behind this agreement is that it continues to support farmers through the transition from the old failed system of our farm program to the new Freedom to Farm legislation, as well as to address needs created by weather and disease disasters.

It does not attempt to throw another net of Washington programs over our farmers.

Despite the partisan grandstanding you have heard, the plan before us will provide the transition assistance that our farmers need. And it will not undo the Freedom to Farm policy that we worked so hard to achieve.

Farmers in Minnesota have made it clear to me that they do not want welfare. The relief plan currently in the Agriculture Appropriations report avoids going in that direction. It is a one-time support package, as opposed to returning to our failed agriculture policies of the past. It also avoids the flaw of lifting the loan caps, a move that would both exacerbate the current grain glut and also distort market signals, encouraging excess production, which would continue low prices.

It is painfully clear by this point that the only purpose served by promoting "lifting the loan caps" is one of grandstanding, and we all know that a higher loan rate leads both to increased production, larger surpluses along with lower prices.

This option again was rejected by the Senate, Senate twice, yet it keeps coming back, rearing its ugly head.

There is simply no justifiable basis for a Presidential veto of the Agriculture Appropriations bill.

As we have heard Chairman COCHRAN explain here on the floor, it contains a lot of money for production agriculture. So a threatened veto is certainly not about money—it is about politics.

I remind my colleagues the President's original request for farmer relief—the original request—was \$2.3 billion. The current package contains more than \$4 billion. Now, however, he wants to veto legislation providing more money than his request. He has changed his mind and now wants \$3 billion more.

This is simply a half-hearted attempt by the President to back a Democrat effort to revisit the Freedom to Farm bill. This is legislation that only 2 years ago, the Congress and President Clinton himself agreed it was needed to move the business of agriculture out of the grip of Government control.

It is disturbing to me that when the White House does not get its way, it vetoes legislation or takes it to the courts, and if rejected there, appeals to the higher courts. The bottom line is that it continues to try and go around Congress, rejecting decisions made by a majority of Congress.

Minnesota farmers should not be used as pawns in an election-year drama. The President should help farmers by signing this significant, emergency legislation, rather than joining those here who seek to undo the progress that has been made on agriculture policy.

The solution is here before us, and delays will be laid right at the President's feet. For the sake of our nation's farmers, let's end the bidding war. Let's end it now. I strongly urge the President to reconsider his decision as he reviews this crucial legislation again in the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, Senator GRAMS from Minnesota, for his speech, but also for the homework and dedication that he had on this piece of legislation. He had some concerns about it. He raised those concerns. He was an effective Senator. We worked to alleviate some of those concerns and we wanted to make sure that no person who is in a foreign field—that these actions would cause them greater pain or greater discrimination. So I thank him for his efforts on the Religious Freedom Act, and I also thank him for his statement that he just made on the ag bill. I happen to agree with his statements wholeheartedly.

#### FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION ACT OF 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator FEINSTEIN be included as a cosponsor.

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise to express my support for the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which is the substitute amend-

ment to H.R. 2431 being offered by the Senator from Oklahoma.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation and respect for the distinguished Assistant Majority Leader, Senator NICKLES, and the distinguished Senator from Connecticut, Senator LIEBERMAN. I want to salute their deeply held commitment to religious freedom for all people. I am aware that they and their staffs have been negotiating this bill for many months. They have been through draft after draft, talking with the Administration, a large number of Senators with different interests, and a wide range of concerned outside organizations.

Their mission has been to produce a bill that would make a meaningful contribution to combating the problem of religious persecution in foreign countries, one that would pass with broad support in the Senate, and a bill that the President would sign. I know how long and hard they have been working on this effort.

Earlier this week, they had hoped to move the bill forward. There were still a number of provisions which I was concerned about, and I felt that since the bill had not come through the Foreign Relations Committee, on which I sit, and would not be open to amendment on the floor, I wanted a chance to address those concerns.

Despite the marathon talks the Assistant Majority Leader and the Senator from Connecticut had already engaged in on this bill with so many others, and despite my late entry into the fray, they graciously and without hesitation agreed to sit down with me to see if we could come to common agreement. We were also joined by Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat.

I am happy to report that, as a result of these discussions, with good will by all sides, we were able to reach agreement on each of the provisions that was of concern to me, and I think the bill is better for it. Let me explain what we agreed upon.

First, I have come to the conclusion that when the Congress legislates sanctions, we need to provide the President with a reasonable amount of flexibility in the implementation, both to respond to changing conditions, and to protect other American interests.

Normally, we provide the President with a waiver authority for sanctions, but the standard of that waiver is critical. The State Department believes, and I agree, that the "national security" waiver standard in the most recent draft was too high—it would be difficult for the President to waive the sanctions required under this act except in extraordinary circumstances. A waiver of "national interest" was deemed by the sponsors to be too low. So we compromised: the President can now waive the sanctions in this bill if the "important national interest" requires it.

Second, the definition of what constitutes a "particularly severe viola-

tion" of religious freedom was originally drafted in such a way that it could have inadvertently triggered other sanctions—those required for gross violations of human rights—under sections 116 and 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act. There was no intent on the part of the sponsors to trigger two sets of sanctions, so it was simply a matter of ensuring that a different standard was required for each trigger.

The standard we agreed upon was proposed by Senator LIEBERMAN. Particularly severe violations of religious freedom are now defined as "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom." To my mind, this is neither a higher nor lower standard than the "consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights" that requires a separate set of sanctions under the Foreign Assistance Act, but it is a sufficiently different standard that it a finding under one act should not automatically trigger sanctions under both acts. I think this is an important improvement in the bill.

Third, we were concerned that there could be situations in which the President has already taken significant action against a country, in large part to respond to human rights abuses, and then a finding of particularly severe violations of religious freedom would require additional actions under this act. In the case of a country like Sudan, where we have already imposed extensive sanctions, it makes sense for the President to be able to cite an existing sanction as fulfilling the requirements of the International Religious Freedom Act.

Again, to the best of my knowledge, the sponsors of the bill had no desire to force the President to impose redundant sanctions on a country. So, in section 402(C)(4) we have developed language that allows the President to cite an existing sanction as fulfilling the requirements of this act. I think this change also makes the bill better.

We are all aware that there are people of faith who are suffering for their beliefs in many parts of the world. As a nation founded on the precious principle of religious freedom, a principle which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights, we cannot and must not turn a deaf ear to the cries of the oppressed. Making the protection of religious freedom a high priority in our foreign policy is the right thing to do.

The challenge is to create mechanisms to promote religious freedom and protect persecuted believers that: provide enough flexibility to respond to different conditions at different times and places; avoid unintentionally making life harder for those we seek to help; and, make a meaningful contribution to the cause of religious freedom without unduly jeopardizing other important national interests.

That is why I have so much respect for what the distinguished Assistant Majority Leader and the distinguished Senator from Connecticut have been