again, very simply, let us not spend it before we get it. If we do, we will do much more harm than good.

Secondly, at a hearing of the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health this afternoon, it was brought out once again that we are now growing about 23 billion board feet of new trees and timber each year in our national forests. Yet we are allowing only 3 billion board feet, or only one-seventh of the new growth, to be cut.

There is about 6 billion board feet of dead or dying trees and timber in the national forests. In other words, we are allowing trees to be cut at only half the number that are dead or dying.

In addition, it was brought out that there are 500 million acres of forest land in the United States which are not in the national forests. This is an amount of land equal to about 900 Great Smoky Mountain National Parks. People look at a map of this country on one small page in a book and they simply do not realize how big this Nation is. Yet there are environmental extremists who just do not want us to cut any trees.

If we are going to have healthy forests, we have to cut some trees. If we are going to have reasonably priced homes, books, toilet paper, newspapers, magazines, we have to cut some trees. And as shocking as it may to some who have heard only one side of propaganda from these environmental extremists, when we are growing 23 billion board feet each year in our national forests and cutting only 3 billion. We should cut much more so that our forests can be healthier and so that prices can be lower on almost everything.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to read on the front page of yesterday's Washington Times that many States are now moving away from the metric system. I am pleased that we gave the States some flexibility on this in last year's highway bill. This was something the Federal Government and a few powerful liberal elitists tried to force on us, but the American people never accepted the metric system. Unfortunately, this has cost our government at all levels and business many billions of dollars.

There was never a good reason to go to the metric system in this country. We have made this very expensive effort only because it would be helpful to a few large multinational corporations and because some people unfortunately think that anything that is done in most of the rest of the world should automatically be done here.

Yet for most of this Nation's history, Americans were not afraid to be a little bit different, a little bit unique, a little bit special. I hope the Federal Government and all the State governments will be responsive to our own citizens for once and end this expensive and elitist effort to force an unnecessary metric system down on us.

Let me add, Mr. Speaker, one other thing, just because of the vote, the defeat, we had on this national day of prayer bill that we just had in this body. William Raspberry, the great columnist for The Washington Post, wrote several years ago, he said, is it not just possible that anti-religious bias masquerading as religious neutrality has cost this Nation far more than we have been willing to acknowledge?

A very good statement by William Raspberry, a very good question for all Americans to ask: Is it not just possible that anti-religious bias masquerading as religious neutrality has cost us far more than we have been willing to acknowledge?

## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FOR SENIORS

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, seniors are being forced to choose between buying food and their prescribed medications.

The high cost of prescription drugs is particularly difficult for seniors, who use one-third of all prescriptions. Medicare does not cover prescription drugs. So, many seniors, 37 percent, do not have prescription drug coverage and must incur these expenditures out of their own pocket.

Studies conducted by the Committee on Government Reform minority staff show that older Americans pay much higher costs than other groups. These studies show that in congressional districts across the Nation, seniors pay for prescription drugs, on average, nearly twice as much as the drug companies' favored customers, such as the Federal Government and large HMOs who have the economies of scale who can purchase it in large quantities.

So seniors are paying double what the Federal Government may be paying through the VA or through some other program.

This price differential is approximately five times greater than the average price differential for other consumer goods. So it is actually five times more than what the economies of scale and other consumer goods may cost for large purchasers.

H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, allows pharmacies to purchase drugs for Medicare beneficiaries at the best price charged to the Federal Government through programs such as the VA or Medicaid. The legislation has been estimated to reduce prescription drug prices for seniors by more than 40 percent.

That is not price controls, Mr. Speaker. H.R. 664 just ends discrimination and allows seniors to buy just like a large customer would do, seniors on Medicare, fee for service.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a bunch of Democrats trying to play politics with this issue. What we are trying to do is bring up an issue that affects all Americans, because many seniors have no prescription drug benefits. It affects people in my district like Ms. Holec of Houston, Texas. Ms. Holec is 85-years-old and relies on Social Security as her primary source of income. She also has a medical condition that requires her to buy prescription drugs that cost $260 every month. Ms. Holec already has had to sell her car and some of her furniture to pay for her prescription drugs.

□ 1915

What is she supposed to do when she runs out of things to sell and can no longer afford her medicine that costs her now $3,000 a year? What if she develops another condition or requires another prescription drug? The solution to the problem is the Medicare prescription benefit, one that recognizes today's health needs of senior citizens.

Today the President announced his Medicare modernization proposal. I expect many people will talk about or speak out against this proposal, but before they do, think of my constituent and maybe another constituent, someone like Mrs. Holec, who is forced to spend a significant portion of her income on prescription medication or prescription drugs.

The President's plan will establish a new voluntary Medicare part D prescription drug benefit that is both affordable and available to all beneficiaries in fee-for-service.

The Medicare task force that was made up of House Members, Senators, and public members failed for primarily two reasons: One, it forced low-income seniors into managed care, and it did not include a prescription drug benefit.

Mr. Speaker, seniors should not have to look to managed care for their health needs. They should be able to look to Medicare. Whether it is the Prescription Drug Fairness Act that I am a cosponsor of, or the proposal outlined by the President today, or maybe another proposal that some Members would come up with, we have the responsibility to provide for this critical benefit.

Simply relying on managed care to meet this need is both unrealistic and unfair to beneficiaries. HMO coverage of prescription drugs varies widely between plans, and often has caps that do not fit the needs of the beneficiaries. Moreover, some beneficiaries do not have an HMO choice because they live in rural areas, Mr. Speaker.

I hope my Republican colleagues are as committed to solving this problem as the President is and my Democratic colleagues. If so, maybe they can join us in support of either one of these proposal or develop a new proposal, just so we can make sure that seniors have prescription medication without having to literally put themselves into poverty to do so.

However, to continue to do nothing it seems, like we do with so many issues important to hard-working Americans, is not the option. So I hope many Members will look at not only what the

President proposed today, but also H.R. 664, to see if we cannot come up with a solution during this Congress, before the end of the year, to solve the problems of seniors who have to pay an inordinate amount, double in some cases what prescription medication would be for other Americans.

## DAIRY LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk tonight with some of my friends who I see are already here on the floor about dairy legislation. June is National Dairy Month. We are coming to really a fateful decision on dairy policy.

The Secretary of Agriculture has proposed an option for dairy policy that really does not work for most of the country. In fact, I have a chart here, Mr. Speaker, that shows the impact of this policy if it had been in existence over the last 5 years. There would only have been 1 year where America's dairy farmers would have been above the line of break even. The average for those 5 years would have been a loss of $196 million.

Dairy farming families certainly cannot continue to stay in business with those kinds of statistics and those kinds of odds. We are really in a process here where, after some time, I would have thought adequate time for study and lots of impact from Members of Congress, we came up with a very disappointing result.

Tomorrow in full committee markup H.R. 1402 will be marked up by the Committee on Agriculture that really follows a policy that a majority of the Members of the House and Senate have advocated. The bill, H.R. 1402, has 228 cosponsors.

Last year, as this policy was approaching a decision by the administration, by the Secretary of Agriculture, 238 House Members and 61 Senators wrote to Secretary Glickman asking that Option 1–A, a continuation of an option with a more consolidated, more effective, more updated series of marketing orders, would become the dairy policy for the country.

So we are here tonight to talk a little about this, and National Dairy Month, as dairy farmers all over the country are having a harder and harder time making ends meet, having a harder and harder time breaking even.

One of the leaders in this debate has been my friend, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON), from my neighboring district in Arkansas. My district is in Southeast Missouri, and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON) represents northwestern Arkansas.

Both of those districts have been great dairy districts over the years, but both of those districts have seen a significant decline in the number of dairy farms and dairy farmers.

In fact, in my district in southwest Missouri, at one time the eighth biggest dairy-producing district in America, and we do not rate nearly that high now, and we have been losing our dairies at the rate of about 8 percent a year.

Northwest Arkansas has been a great dairy area, and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON) has been a real advocate for dairy farmers and dairy farming families.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON).

Mr. HUTCHINSON. I thank the gentleman for yielding to me, Mr. Speaker, and also for his leadership on this very important issue on behalf of dairy farmers.

I likewise am concerned, being from Arkansas. In my two counties in northwestern Arkansas we have had a loss of 43 percent of our dairy farmers. Ryan England came to me and asked me to do something to help him. I just have this chart that shows a little bit of the difficulty that our dairy farmers have faced.

We know that if we look back over the last 18, 19 years to 1980, if we look at the price of milk, the all farm price we would have of milk versus the retail price we have in the store, of course everyone knows that the retail price of milk has gone consistently up. Yet, the farm price of milk has remained steady through that time, with some fluctuation primarily downward.

We know that during that time the cost of production for our farmers has not remained steady, it has gone up. The cost of fuel, the cost of feed, everything that they would need to produce the milk on the farm, electricity, all has gone up, yet they have not received any benefit of the rising prices. So it has been a very difficult time for the farmers.

One of the options that have been considered is a dairy compact. This has worked very well in the Northeast. I know some of my colleagues here from the Northeast have indicated that it has worked very well for them, but 21 Governors, 21 Governors have signed legislation in their States requesting Congress to delegate its regulatory authority over their States' milk markets.

Right now, of course, as my friends know, Mr. Speaker, the Federal system is that we have the prices set out of Washington, a Federal price marketing system. We believe there should be more reflection of the prices in the States and more control being returned to the States. So the Governor has said Congress should delegate some of that regulatory authority back to the States, the regions, to have a dairy compact in the Southeast, a Southern Dairy Compact, as they have had in the Northeast, which worked very well for consumers as well as for the dairy farmers and the processors.

I say to my friend, I believe that is important. I just want to thank everyone for being interested in this, supporting the dairy farmers. Hopefully the legislation that my friend from Missouri is sponsoring will move forward, as well as this dairy compact legislation. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. BLUNT. One of the things I might mention while that chart is still up there, Mr. Speaker, is that farm prices have stayed the same, have taken dips along the way, but the retail price has increased. One of the things the studies show on this proposed Option 1–A is that it does have benefits for farmers, but the benefit for consumers is the benefit of a fresh product being available, there continues to be competition in production, and consumers continue to have not only a good product but they have a competitive price, because we do not see this continued consolidation that we are seeing and that all projections would show that we would see under the other options being proposed.

Any time we have met with the Secretary of Agriculture, people from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on this issue, one of the people that has been in the room has been the gentleman from Maine. I yield to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACCI) on this topic.

Mr. BALDACCI. I thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT) for his leadership on this issue, and for his organizing those meetings with the Members and the Secretary to raise the awareness of how important agriculture and dairy farmers are, not only to his district but to the Nation as a whole.

In Maine the dairy industry is a vital component of the agricultural economy. Sales of milk generate cash receipts totalling almost $100 million a year. That was before the bottom fell out. Those sales from about 600 farms 20 years ago, it was nearly twice that number.

The loss of family farms in Maine and the loss of farmer income not only affect related industries, such as equipment and feed suppliers, but it ripples through the rural economy.

I think, as we have heard here earlier, the debate in terms of an option of 1–A versus 1–B is relating to having farmers get at least some meager return for the amount of work and effort and resources and sacrifice they have put into the work they are doing.

The work that they are doing extends beyond just the farm itself, but into the community. Their children and family members are involved in 4–H, in community projects. Because of the loss of farm families in the agricultural community, I believe that has been one of the problems in rural America and in all of America, is that it has not reinforced that family unit, that community sense and that responsibility that we have to each other that I believe emanates a lot from agriculture.