local school districts set the curriculum. They hire the staff. States set standards and certify teachers. States and localities raise and spend 93 percent of all education funding. A lack of local control is not the problem. It is a lack of sufficient support and resources.

States, school districts, parents, and teachers are demanding that we, at the Federal level, work in partnership to ensure our kids get a good education. What matters to parents is that their kids get the best education possible. Parents don't care how the workload is divided. They care about results. And Democrats are focused on results.

One of the problems with block grants is that—in the budgeting process—they always end up getting cut because those dollars are not longer tired to a specific need. With block grants, our kids end up with fewer educational resources than they had before. In fact, we are already seeing a move underway to give our students fewer resources.

The Republican budget plan passed out of the House could jeopardize our ability to meet the needs in America's schools. Their plan could jeopardize our ability to keep hiring new teachers to make classrooms less crowded. They could jeopardize our ability to provide afterschool programs, to ensure safe and drug-free schools, to modernize old schools, and to build new ones.

Their plan could result in having $2.6 billion less for education than the President has requested. We shouldn't be shortchanging America's students, but I am concerned that is what the House Republican budget plan would do.

In fact, according the Congressional Budget Office, the Republican budget plan doesn't even keep up with inflation for key domestic investments, like education.

Parents, teachers and students in my home State—and across the country—are asking for help in education.

They want us to work in partnership with them to help their children reach their potential.

They want us to support the commonsense solutions that produce real results for our students.

And when they hear Members of this Congress talking about things that really don't make a difference in the classroom, they get pretty frustrated.

After meeting with and listening to so many frustrated parents and educators, I have come to the floor today to carry their message.

They want us to: Focus on what works. They want us to support the things that make a difference for children in the classroom. And they want us to work together in partnership with State and local educators to help children learn to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

I urge my colleagues to hear these calls loud and clear, to respond by bringing the debate here in Congress back to the realities that teachers, students and parents see in their classrooms every day across this country, and to pass a budget that follows our recipe for success by investing in the resources that every student needs.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and 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. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAMILY FARMERS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I support the pending amendment, which, as I understand, is the Wellstone amendment, a sense-of-the-Senate resolution commending the many farmers—the thousands of farmers and their families—who came to Washington over the last few days to rally in support of what I would call a sensible, sane, rational, and compassionate farm program that would support our farm families throughout this country.

We had farmers from every State. In fact, I listened to one farmer from Alaska who was here, a dairy farmer. So the rally actually was a national rally, one that encompassed all parts of our country.

What I heard, in talking to these farm families from across America, was a plaintive cry for us to have a farm policy in America that recognizes the essential worth, the essential importance, of having a structure of agriculture based upon family farming—widely dispersed, broadly based—rather than having a vertical structure characterized by conglomerates and huge vertical integrators that does not respond to the needs of local areas.

What these farm families were expressing was a frustration, a frustration borne out of their life experiences in knowing that what they have done and what their parents and grandparents before them had done in agriculture, knowing that this had benefited not only our Nation but had benefited the areas in which they lived. Because we had a lot of farm families in rural areas, we had prosperous small towns and communities. We had businesses in those communities. We had good schools and churches. We had a sense of community in rural America. Out of this structure in rural America came the sons and daughters who went on to colleges—land grant colleges, many of them—and who then became some of the great leaders of our country.

I need not remind those in this body of some of the great leaders in our own Senate who came from rural America, small towns and communities, farm families. I just saw our distinguished former majority and minority leader, Senator Dole, come across the floor. He comes from Russell, KS. You can't find a much smaller town than that. He has dedicated his life to public service. He is a great friend of mine and was a great leader in the Senate. I wonder how many more leaders we will get in this country coming from small towns and rural America when all these small towns have dried up, when there are no more opportunities there.

I think what I heard at this rally was this frustration. The farm families know what they have contributed to the well-being of our country and our communities. Yet now they are being decimated. They see their neighbors, one by one, being driven off the farm because of the economic structure we have in America. In 1998, two Iowa State University economists reported that as many as one-third of Iowa farmers would face serious financial problems if the farm economy did not improve. They would either restructure their operations or go out of business entirely. That was one out of three estimated in 1998.

Earlier this year, an updated study by the same economists concluded that as many as half of all Iowa farmers are classified as financially weak or severely stressed; that is, every other farmer in the State of Iowa is in real trouble.

A couple of farm families spoke to me when I was at the rally on the Mall in response to something I had heard, saying that their churches, which used to be packed on Sunday morning—all the pews were filled—are now half empty, that they can't even afford to pay their own minister any longer. They have a circuit rider who rides to three or four churches a week. So they lack that kind of pastoral counseling upon which families have come to rely. Indeed, we are seeing a wholesale selling out of our farm and ranch families and our rural communities. The stakes are very high.

I heard this great frustration from all of these farm families. Their question to us is: What are you going to do? Is this just some inevitable, invisible hand that is doing this, or are the laws of our country structured so they discriminate unfairly against family farmers? I think the latter is true. There is no invisible handwriting that farm families are a relic of the past, that our farmers have to get bigger and bigger and bigger, that our small towns have to dry up. I think it is because of policies we set in the Congress. I think those policies have to change.

The farm bill we have now, the so-called Freedom to Farm bill, has been a wreck. There is only one good part of it, and that is planting flexibility. That is all. The rest of it has been a wreck. The Federal Government has sent out over $15 billion in emergency money in the past 2 years. That is not counting what we sent out under the regular farm bill itself. Of course, that money was needed by the bankers, by the chemical and fertilizer dealers, by the repair shops, by the fuel dealers, by the landlords. A lot of that money went out not to save the farmer but to save

the very people about whom I speak: the bankers, chemical and fertilizer dealers, repair shops, and the landlords. In fact, a lot of that money went to farmers who didn't even plant a crop last year. Tell me if that makes sense.

The bailout packages we have had over the last couple of years have been bailouts for the Freedom to Farm bill and not for our farmers. That was a record amount of money we sent out last year. What did it get us? Is the farm economy any healthier? No.

USDA tells us if we don't pass an emergency package again this year, net farm income is going to fall by 17 percent compared to last year. Tell me what farmer can afford to take another 17-percent cut. That is net farming; that is not gross. That is what they used to clothe and feed their families and buy some new equipment, pay the mortgage, and hopefully set aside a little bit for the children to go to college.

So it looks as if we will have to come up with another emergency package again this year. That is not a farm program. That is not a farm bill. That is lurching from one emergency to the next. Again, our farmers are the victims.

I was hopeful that this year we could have some hearings and a debate on the Freedom to Farm bill to see what changes we could make in it to get to a rational system of farm supports, a farm program combining conservation, storage payments, better loan rates, some shorter term set-aside programs, so we would have a balanced package, the prices at the farmgate would be higher, so the farmers could get their money from the marketplace and not from a Government paycheck. That is the debate we need. Yet that debate is not going to happen this year. We are not going to have the hearings, and we will not have the debate.

Quite frankly, the frustration felt by most of these farm families is going to continue to fester and grow. I think we will see even more frustration in rural America because we lack the will and, quite frankly, we lack the leadership to redress the failed Freedom to Farm bill.

I compliment the Senator from Minnesota for his sense-of-the-Senate resolution. I believe the farm families who took money out of their own pockets, which they could ill afford to do—they got on buses; they came here and endured rain and cold weather, slogging around in mud and water to make their case known to Congress, exercising their first amendment rights to petition their Government—did what is in the best tradition of America. I hope their voices and the frustration we heard will not go unheeded. I hope we can understand that we have an obligation in this body and in the other body to address the plight of what is happening in rural America today.

I come from a small town of 150 people. I remember growing up as a child when we had an elevator, we had a grocery store, a hardware store, and a small implement dealer. They are all gone now. They are all gone. I am not saying we have to save every town of 150 people. But it is not only those towns. It is those towns of 2,000, 3,000, or 5,000 people that are also going under, because I believe we don't have an adequate farm program that will enable our farmers to get a better price in the marketplace.

Again, I support this resolution. I commend the farmers who came here. I hope and trust we can hear their plea and do something about changing the failed Freedom to Farm bill.

I also wish to say I hope after this vote at 11 o'clock we can have a resounding vote in support of the crop insurance bill that is before us. We need to fix the Crop Insurance Program.

I commend Senator ROBERTS from Kansas and Senator KERREY from Nebraska for their leadership in this area.

The Crop Insurance Program needs to be changed. We put $6 billion in the budget last year for that. I believe it will be a very strong part of helping farmers get through some of these tough times that we have right now. It is not the answer to all of the problems in the farm communities, but it is a part of it.

Hopefully, with this modified crop insurance bill, we can go to conference with the House right away and get it to the President by May. I will for my part do everything I can with the conferees on our side to expedite the conference. There are not that many differences between the House and the Senate bill—a few, but nothing we can't work out in a timely manner.

I hope we can get this crop insurance bill through. I hope we can get a resounding vote for it, and at least send some hope to our family farmers that at least in the area of crop insurance and revenue insurance coverage we are going to pay some attention.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, morning business is closed.

RISK MANAGEMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 2251, which the clerk will report by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2251) to amend the Federal Crop Insurance Act to improve crop insurance coverage, to provide agricultural producers with choices to manage risk, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Wellstone Amendment No. 2888, to express the sense of Congress regarding the Rally for Rural America and the rural crisis.

AMENDMENT NO. 2888

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. L. CHAFEE). Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to the vote on amendment 2888.

The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Two minutes for each side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Two minutes equally divided.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, this is a sense-of-the-Congress amendment. It thanks the people who came here for the rally for rural America. It makes it clear that the Congress has heard their plea and that we will respond with a clear and strong message to alleviate the agricultural price crisis, to ensure competitive markets, to invest in rural education and health care, and to ensure a safe and secure food supply for all.

The crop insurance bill is a good bill. I thank my colleagues for the work. I want to make sure with this amendment we are clear this is just the first step. We need to do much more. We hear the people who came. We commend them for coming. Many of them came by bus from Minnesota and many other States. We are committed to taking some important action that will make a positive difference.

That is what this sense-of-the-Senate amendment is all about. When colleagues vote for this, I think it is a strong vote. We will come back with specific proposals which will be a part of what I think this amendment calls for.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I commend the distinguished Senator from Minnesota for his amendment. On our side of the aisle, we are hopeful that Members will vote for the amendment.

I simply add, we do hear loudly and clearly the voices of those who participated in the rally for rural America. This very day, the Senate will take action, we believe, to at least answer a part of the problem of a strong safety net for the income of farmers in our country. Indeed, $6 billion of taxpayer resources will be devoted, given Budget Committee action, to the safety net for our producers in the event we take timely action. I stress the timely aspect of that.

As all Senators note, we have tried very hard, working with the distinguished ranking member, Senator HARKIN, with the cooperation of Senator WELLSTONE, concerning those who have pioneered this effort—Senator ROBERTS, Senator KERREY, and others—to bring about something I hope will be almost unanimous.