

the program by waiving some of the eligibility requirements. But even that has not worked to bring trade-impacted farmers into the program.

After several decades of trying with little success to squeeze farmers into eligibility rules designed for manufacturing workers it is time to try something new.

What this bill does is create a TAA program better tailored to the needs of farmers, ranchers, and fishermen. Basically, the program creates a new trigger for eligibility. Instead of having to show a layoff, the farmer, rancher or fisherman has to show commodity price declines related to imports.

The trigger is different, but the program serves the same purposes. It is basically a hybrid of the TAA for workers and TAA for firms programs, using parts of each that make sense for agricultural producers. It assists the farmer, rancher or fisherman to adjust to import competition, to retrain, to obtain technical assistance, and to have access to income support to tide them over during the process. And the income support is capped and is subject to gross income limitations to make sure that the program is not being abused.

The last important innovation in this bill deals with health insurance. One common criticism of the existing program is that it does nothing to help workers with health insurance.

It is virtually impossible for a worker to pay the mortgage, feed his family, and pay health insurance premiums on \$250 a week. The worker faces a terrible choice. He can retrain under TAA in the hope of a better job—but risk going without health insurance for his family for up to two years. Or he can pass up the opportunity to retrain for a better future and take a dead-end job right away to make ends meet.

The bipartisan Trade Deficit Review Commission concluded that lack of assistance with health insurance is a significant disincentive to complete TAA training. As I said before, this group unanimously recommended that the Government help workers bridge the insurance gap between old and new jobs. And that is what we have done with this bill. Again, Secretary Rumsfeld, Ambassador Hills, and Ambassador Zoellick agreed to this point.

The bill before us today includes a 73-percent advanceable, refundable tax credit for COBRA premiums for workers eligible for TAA benefits. TAA participants who are not eligible for COBRA can use the tax credit to purchase health insurance from various State-sponsored group plans.

This issue has been surprisingly controversial. I am not saying that there is only one right way to address this issue. But what has shocked me is the number of voices suggesting that we should do nothing at all; that is, that we not help people, who are displaced on account of trade, with health insurance. That is just not acceptable. I hope we are past that now and headed

toward a reasonable compromise and that we can move forward constructively to help people who need health insurance.

Now that I have gone over the main parts of the bill, I want to speak a little about the tradition of bipartisanship on trade adjustment assistance.

Since its inception, the TAA program has always enjoyed wide bipartisan support. As I said before, a lot of work has gone into making sure this bill is no exception.

Before the bill was drafted, we consulted widely with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle. We have continued that outreach throughout the process. I thank again, Senator BINGAMAN and Senator DASCHLE for their leadership on this issue. But I also thank Senator GRASSLEY, whose proposal with Senator CONRAD for a TAA for farmers program became the core of this bill. And I thank Senator SNOWE, who has made some very important contributions to the bill dealing with fishermen, small businesses, and other issues. Her support and sponsorship are very much appreciated.

We have also talked with the administration. They raised some technical and not-so-technical issues, and we have been able to come to understandings on many of them.

The administration wanted us to tighten up training waivers, and we did. They wanted us to cap the wage insurance program, and we did. They wanted us to revise TAA's on-the-job training provisions to work more like WIA. We did. They wanted us to clarify the definition of secondary workers and to make sure the Department of Labor has enough time to consider secondary worker petitions. We did that, too.

This process of give and take has been healthy. It has been useful. And I think the result is a good, solid, thoughtful bill, one that will make this program more fair, more efficient, and more user friendly.

If we want to rebuild the center on trade, improving trade adjustment assistance is critical. It is an integral part. It is a necessary part. I urge all my colleagues to support this provision and support the larger trade package, particularly when we proceed to consider it at a later point either this week or next.

I thank the Chair. And I particularly thank my friend from Alaska for his indulgence.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DASCHLE. I ask unanimous consent the Senate now proceed to a period for morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BIDEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DASCHLE. Let me further stipulate, Senators be limited to 10 minutes in time.

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

The Senator from Alaska.

(The remarks of Mr. STEVENS pertaining to the introduction of S. 2481 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RAISING EPA TO CABINET-LEVEL STATUS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in recent years, some of my colleagues have opposed elevating the Environmental Protection Agency to Cabinet-level status. You and I have argued that the protection of our public health and environment, EPA's mandate, is as important as the congressional mandates which guide other Cabinet-level agencies. If the EPA enjoyed the same status as the Department of Energy or the Interior Department, maybe EPA's policies would carry the day occasionally.

As things stand, EPA is certainly losing the battle within this administration from clean air to climate change to snowmobiles in our national parks. EPA's views are overridden, undervalued, and watered down.

Take the issue of snowmobiles in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. I have spoken about these issues before. I have offered amendments that have been adopted in this regard. Snowmobiling in Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park has become popular in recent years; so popular, in fact, that the activities overwhelm the parks, its employees, and its wildlife.

Up to 1,000 snowmobilers enter the Yellowstone Park on winter weekends, most of them through the gateway community of West Yellowstone, MT. On steel cold days, a visible haze hangs over the park's gate and surrounding area. Rangers at this park wore Park Service-issued respirators this winter because the air quality had been so degraded by emissions from snowmobile engines.

I repeat, park rangers at Yellowstone National Park wore respirators because the air was so bad because of snowmobiles. These respirators were issued by the Park Service.

What have we come to when rangers have to wear a respirator in our national parks? At the very least, it is an embarrassment. I think it is a tragedy.

EPA, the protector of the air we breathe, wisely advocated banning snowmobiles due to their air quality impacts, but those were not the only impacts EPA raised. Snowmobiles also