

took place today absolutely horrendous.

Again, it is disingenuous to suggest that we would have to consider both when one is so clear cut, and the need is so necessary, and women are being denied. That is what is going on here. It is wrong. So when we have a bill that is going to be acted on, I will come to the floor—I hope with a number of my colleagues—to offer this legislation as an amendment and get a vote. Let the people of America see this. The people are going to be so full of pride that we will not allow something that is so obviously necessary that they are going to hold it hostage, because that is what is taking place with this legislation. It has been held hostage, and it is disingenuous to come down here and say you have to take this great big piece of legislation or we can't even let the women of America have freedom from the fear that they will be denied that which they should have—reconstructive surgery and to stay in the hospital until their doctor says now is the time to go home, not a bean counter, someone who limits you to 24 or 48 hours.

I hope my colleagues will join with me in this endeavor, making it a bipartisan fight to see that the women and families of America get justice.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I certainly will. I thank the Senator for his leadership and commitment to this issue.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH, EXTENSION, AND EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 1998—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the conference report.

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The committee on conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the bill (S. 1150), have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by all of the conferees.

The Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of April 22, 1998.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Indiana is recognized to speak for up to 30 minutes.

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I will consume much of my time at this juncture, reserve the balance, and yield to other colleagues.

I am very pleased that the Senate is now prepared to debate the conference report on S. 1150, the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998.

I thank especially Senator TOM HARKIN, the ranking minority member of the committee, and all committee members for their efforts to work together to fashion legislation to garner the support of 74 Senators and a large

host of agricultural, nutrition and religious organizations.

I point out that we had a good conference with our House colleagues. This is complex legislation. This is not the first time the Congress has had a conference report. It is usual, at least in matters of this variety, for the report to attract less attention. But ours is important. And I appreciate this opportunity to highlight that importance this morning.

Our initiatives will help farmers in this country to produce food for the world's people and to do so at a profit while guarding the environment of this country and the world. S. 1150 also resolves a funding crisis for the Federal Crop Insurance Program, preventing the loss of coverage for farmers in every State. The bill extends an important initiative from the 1996 farm bill that provides resources for rural development and research priorities. And, finally, S. 1150 allows food stamp benefits to be provided to limited groups of the disabled, the elderly, political refugees, and children who immigrated to this country legally.

Many of our colleagues have called for dramatic increases in funding for Federal scientific research. This advocacy is altogether appropriate. Unfortunately, agricultural research has received much less attention. Funding has declined in real terms for some years, and Mr. President, has declined in some areas to a point that we are no longer prepared to resist some of the insect and other disease pests that endanger our food supply.

It took visionaries like Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Norman Borlaug who came before our committee and eloquently pointed out how agricultural research is the future of mankind. It is the basis upon which mankind will be able to persist by the year 2050. Millions of people are now alive who would have died from malnutrition had it not been for the food productivity gains from people like Dr. Borlaug, and the thousands of other scientists. Whether it is through the "Green Revolution" of the 1960s, or today's biotechnology, researchers have found ways to coax more food from each acre, tapping more fully the potential of plant and animal food sources.

Further gains in output are not only possible but they are essential if the food needs of the 21st century are to be met. An increasing world population with rising incomes will require more and better food, feed and fiber. It is estimated, as a matter of fact, that their demand will be three times the demand for food which we now have in this year.

Not every farm around the globe is well suited for food production. We have an interest in avoiding the further deforestation and the exploitation of rain forests around the world and other sensitive ecosystems that will be farmed only at a terrible environmental price. Production must be trimmed in areas most appropriate for agriculture such as the United States.

An important part of the answer to this global crisis is our bill, S. 1150. It devotes \$600 million over the next 5 years in mandatory funding to the initiative for future agriculture and food systems. These funds will be competitively awarded to scientists who will undertake cutting-edge research in priority areas such as genome studies, biotechnology, precision agriculture, and other critical fields of work. The new funds will augment the \$1.8 billion existing annual budget for research within the Department of Agriculture.

To make certain the existing budget is spent in the most efficient way, S. 1150 also makes a number of reforms to the Nation's research and extension statutes. These reforms will establish benchmarks and set new requirements for coordination of work among universities, placing new emphasis on activities that cut across several disciplines, involve multiple institutions, and integrate research with public dissemination of those results.

S. 1150 will provide \$200 million per year in mandatory spending to continue fully funding the Federal Crop Insurance Program. These funds, which under current law would need to be appropriated from discretionary accounts, are an integral part of the agreement between private insurers and the Agriculture Department that allows affordable crop insurance to be afforded to the Nation's farmers. Current caps on discretionary spending do not take these expenses into account. Therefore, if the conference report is not approved soon, Congress will either search for discretionary accounts in USDA and other agencies that can be sacrificed to provide the crop insurance funding, or, failing that, contemplate the prospect of insurance policies being canceled for thousands of farmers who annually face the uncertainty of how the weather will affect their crops.

S. 1150 offsets about half of these crop insurance costs. For the remaining half, the conferees found reforms and spending cuts within the Crop Insurance Program itself that saved the requisite amount of money. These cuts, such as reducing the level of reimbursement provided for companies' administrative costs, set the stage for further reform and improvement of the crop insurance system in the future.

The conference report also provides for \$100 million in new funding for Funds for Rural America, recognizing the pressing needs of those in rural areas and working to improve the quality of life for those living in rural America.

The conference report restores food stamp benefits to about 250,000 legal immigrants who otherwise would be ineligible for this portion of the Nation's safety net. Generally, the categories of immigrants covered by S. 1150 correspond to those who last year regained access to the Supplemental Security Income—the SSI Program—under separate legislation; namely, the

balanced budget amendment. These immigrants, the elderly, the disabled, political refugees, and seekers of asylum, were either in the United States legally before the passage of the historic 1996 welfare reform law—and that is the case for the elderly, the children, and the disabled—or in the case of asylees and refugees, were subject to political persecution for other circumstances that makes their residence here less than fully voluntary. In addition, immigrant children under 18 who were in the United States legally before the passage of welfare reform will also become eligible. There was no corresponding restoration of SSI benefits last year since children are generally not eligible for SSI.

Senate bill 1150 fully offsets all costs. It reduces expenditure of mandatory funds for computer acquisition by USDA, a practice generally not available to other departments or even to most agencies within USDA. The bill scales back some recent increases in employment and training funds within the Food Stamp Program.

Finally, the bulk of savings in S. 1150 are achieved by correcting an unintentional provision in the welfare reform law which would otherwise allow States to be paid twice for the same administrative costs of providing food stamp benefits determining eligibility and performing other such functions.

S. 1150 is the result of lengthy negotiations, careful thought, and dedicated work. It will help our Nation increase its food supply at a profit to our farmers. The bill shores up the crop insurance system in a timely way, allowing producers to manage risks intelligently. It gives access to the Food Stamp Program to vulnerable individuals who reside in this country legally.

A large coalition of organizations who support this conference report are actively seeking Senate passage. Commodity groups, bankers, those involved in the crop insurance industry, scientific societies, and nutrition advocates, religious organizations, and 67 land grant colleges and universities have voiced their support for this legislation.

Mr. President, I appreciate that many Senators who have written in favor of this legislation by petition or through individual letters to the majority leader have indicated strong support for all of these provisions. But obviously there are Senators—and we shall have a debate this afternoon on the specific question of refugees and asylees and food stamps for these persons as legal immigrants.

Let me dwell for just a moment on the particulars of that issue.

Refugees are immigrants whom the State Department has permitted to enter the United States for the purpose of escaping persecution in their home country based upon their political or religious beliefs.

I want to underline that, Mr. President. These are not persons seeking access to our country illegally, coming

across the Rio Grande or the Canadian border or some other nefarious way. They are persons who, by definition, the State Department—and by direction of the President, working with the Judiciary Committees of Congress—has permitted to enter because they are being persecuted for their religious beliefs. Asylees are immigrants who meet the same standards as refugees except they have made it to the United States on their own and applied for permission to stay to avoid having to return to a dangerous situation of jeopardy in their country of origin.

It is not easy to gain either category status. In order to gain admission as a refugee or asylee, someone ordinarily must show that he or she has “a well-founded fear of persecution in his or her own country of origin.” The mere fact the would-be immigrant’s native country is repressive or enmeshed in civil war is insufficient to support application for refugee or asylum status. The applicant must be able to show individually that he or she is specifically and personally at risk. Many people who have not been able to satisfy this strict standard have been imprisoned or killed by oppressive regimes as they went back, sadly enough. The casualty list of those who failed the test individually, a very rigid test, is very long and death occurred to many of these people as they were forced to return.

Now, a somewhat more lenient standard currently exists for applicants from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and for Jews and Evangelical Christians from the former Soviet Union. Under the Lautenberg amendment, these persons must only show that they have a “credible basis” for their fear of persecution in their homeland. The Lautenberg amendment liberalized the ability of persons from these countries to seek refugee status, but it is scheduled to expire at the end of the current fiscal year.

Although some Members may wish to extend this amendment, CBO has said an extension would have a cost. But I point out that even as we discuss this conference report today, the House of Representatives is about to take up a religious liberty and freedom situation. In the Foreign Relations Committee, we will have a hearing on the very same subject today. And I would just say that those who are rigorous in rooting out food stamps need to consider Jews and Evangelical Christians. Specifically, we are talking about those in other fora. We don’t need to talk about them in the Chamber. And these are very important issues, leaving aside ag research, crop insurance, and whatever brought us to this point.

Now, the overwhelming majority of refugees come from just a handful of countries, and I want to go through these specifically. Communist countries: Vietnam, Cuba, Laos; countries making difficult, often violent, transitions: The former Soviet Union and Bosnia; brutal authoritarian regimes: Iraq and Iran; and countries where

Christians are persecuted for their beliefs: Parts of the former Soviet Union and Sudan; or Somalia where the central government is dissolved and the land is ruled by myriad petty warlords.

In recognition of the difficult circumstances of their departure from their home countries and their lack of sponsors in the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Act does not require refugees and asylees to refrain from becoming public charges here. Indeed, a specific program of cash and medical assistance is authorized to support newly arrived refugees. Limited appropriations have forced this program to serve only as an adjunct to the basic Federal benefit programs such as Medicaid and food stamps.

As I mentioned before, the agricultural research conference report, one in which we are involved, did not make all of this up from scratch. We simply have adopted precisely the sections of last year’s Balanced Budget Act on which we all voted, and at that time at least there was a recognition that people who are in these difficult straits really ought to be treated in a humane manner. Among the provisions of the Balanced Budget Act that the ag research bill would apply to food stamps—and we have already adopted it once before—is a 2-year extension, from 5 years to 7 years, of the eligibility for benefits of refugees and asylees for the food stamp situation.

The 1996 welfare law set the exemption for refugees and asylees at 5 years to correspond roughly with the earliest date that most refugees and asylees can apply. So, Mr. President, we philosophically already have crossed that bridge in the Welfare Act quite apart from the Balanced Budget Act—refugees, the same people, asylees, 5 years. The argument is whether that 5 years should become 7 years; it is not whether we should be paying these refugees and asylees support in a humane way.

Most refugees and asylees cannot apply to naturalize until they have been in our country for 4 years and 9 months. That limit soon proved unrealistic because of long, long backlogs in Immigration Service processing and adjudication of applications to naturalize and in swearing in successful applicants—no fault of the refugees and the asylees, Mr. President, an administrative hassle at INS. In a number of INS offices, the backlog exceeds 2 years. If a refugee’s and asylee’s eligibility ended after only 5 years in our country, they could be left without recourse while their applications to naturalize are in the INS pipeline.

The extension of their eligibility for SSI and Medicaid to allow them to receive benefits during their first 7 years in the country was not controversial last year. It was included in all major Republican and Democratic proposals for legal immigrants. I repeat that—all Democratic and Republican proposals. The change was not made applicable to food stamps technically, because the money for restoring benefits to immigrants was allocated to the Finance

Committee and the Agriculture Committee has jurisdiction over food stamps, and on that basis a change that clearly would have automatically flowed did not occur.

Finally, Mr. President, it should be noted that this provision does not assure refugees and asylees of receiving 7 years of benefits; it only exempts them from the new restrictions on legal immigrants' eligibility during their first 7 years. Refugees and asylees will still have to meet all the criteria for everyone else in America to qualify for the benefits. Even refugees and asylees who are self-sufficient for much of their first 7 years in the country will lose the benefit of that exemption after 7 years. They cannot carry it over in terms of months of eligibility beyond the 7-year time. By conforming food stamp rules to those already adopted for Medicaid last summer, the ag research bill will avoid imposing multiple inconsistent eligibility rules on State and local agencies that finally have the responsibility to administer all of this.

The number of refugees entering the country is controlled primarily by ceilings—ceilings, Mr. President—adopted by the President each year in consultation with the Judiciary Committees prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. These ceilings have been declining and are expected to decline to reflect generally improved world conditions since the collapse of the former Soviet Union. For example, in fiscal year 1992, some 114,000 refugees were admitted under the quotas. But by 1996, this number had declined to just under 75,000.

In fiscal year 2000 and thereafter, CBO now estimates the annual quota will be 65,000; approximately 15,000 additional people are granted asylum each year. So, Mr. President, this is a total of 80,000 persons—or 90,000, as of 1996.

Each year, many more people apply for admission as refugees than can be accommodated under the quotas. Thus, an increase of immigrants seeking admission as refugees would not increase the number admitted; it would merely swell the backlog and the waiting lists. The only significant exception to these quotas is Cubans escaping Castro's regime and admitted under the Cuban Entrant Program. That number has fluctuated in recent years from a low of 3,000 in 1991 to a high of 19,000 in 1996.

The number of refugees and asylees coming to the United States is controlled by Congress and the administration. The major current example of this, as I pointed out, an exception, is the Lautenberg amendment, which allows the southeast Asians, Jews, and Evangelical Christians to gain admission as refugees under more lenient rules than those applied to other applicants. CBO has concluded enactment and repeated extension of this provision has prompted the administration to increase the quota on the number of

refugees admitted, and a further extension is likely to cause the administration to raise the refugee quotas by about 18,000 per year.

The number of refugees admitted in the early 1990s as described above includes refugees admitted under the Lautenberg amendment. CBO estimates the increased number admitted will increase Federal costs for means-tested programs, but three-quarters of the cost will come in the Medicaid and SSI Program.

Let me point out, Mr. President, and there is no way that Members would know this without the research of our committee, but it is unlikely that the modest amounts of money available in the food stamp benefits would make, under any circumstances, coming to America more appealing for prospective refugees. The average monthly food stamp benefit for these persons will be under \$72 per month, less than one-fifth of the SSI benefit, which is now estimated by CBO as roughly \$411 per month. It is estimated the fiscal cost of the refugee situation will be \$50 million a year.

I conclude this part of the argument by saying the distinguished occupant of the Chair, as chair of the House Agriculture Committee, and I, worked together on a farm bill which, in conjunction with welfare reform, cut food stamp costs by roughly \$24 billion. There are many in the Finance Committee who deserve great credit for rearranging the circumstances of welfare. But when it comes to significant changes in the cost of welfare in this country, significant reform of food stamps, there are no persons, in my judgment, better able to address this problem than the distinguished occupant of the Chair and myself. We were there. That was the bill that created the entire framework for savings under welfare reform, created the entire framework for fairness, for oversight.

I think that simply needs to be said, at a time when we are talking about, at most, 80,000 persons escaping persecution, and as to whether they should be given an extension of 2 more years due to INS hassles and administration, to become citizens. I think that is a very serious point.

Finally, some have raised the question that this is an entitlement program. I point out that the proposals we are making do not entitle anyone to anything. Essentially, we have several multiyear proposals in the farm bill of 1996. They include the Conservation Reserve Program. They include payments, annually, to farmers who are now leaving various crops, or maybe farming altogether, as the case may be, but without regard to planting. In essence, for years we have adopted multiyear programs in farm bills because it was the preference of the Congress not to return to agricultural legislation annually. We are, in this bill, mandating that for 5 years we should do something very important, at the rate of \$120 million per year, and that

is try to find out, if we can, how to triple our food supply so our acres are more productive, our farmers are more productive, and so the rest of the world will not starve.

I believe that is a very important undertaking. I hope all Senators will see the wisdom of this and support this humane and farsighted measure.

I yield the floor and reserve the remainder of my time.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Texas, Mr. GRAMM, is recognized to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The Senator is recognized.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to the pending conference report. At 2:15, I will be recognized to offer a motion to recommit. What I would like to do in my limited time today is sort of outline how a good bill goes bad through the legislative process.

We passed, in the Senate, a bill funding ag research. The House passed a bill funding ag research. These were not controversial matters, although the method of funding the Senate bill was to some degree controversial. But what happened is when the two Houses met, a simple bill to fund ag research for \$517 million suddenly became a \$1.9 billion program. Three brand new mandatory, or entitlement, programs—depending on which term you prefer—were created, and suddenly we are voting in a conference report which is technically unamendable on provisions that were never voted in either House of Congress.

One of my predecessors, Lyndon Johnson, used to say, "I deeply resent a deal that I'm not part of." And I understand how these things happen, but I simply want to talk about the problems with this bill and focus on the big problem with the bill, which is related to overturning welfare reform.

Going back to where we started, we had an ag research bill in the House, we had an ag research bill in the Senate. We went to conference, and we ended up with a bill that funds crop insurance, which was in neither original bill, and not only funds it but, for the first time ever, makes it a mandatory program which Congress will not vote on again, funding will be automatic over the next 5 years as a result of this program.

The original bill had no hint of food stamps in it. The issue was never debated. I do not believe that a similar provision, if brought to the floor of the Senate under our rules for full debate, could have possibly passed. And, yet, in a simple bill on ag research, we now have \$818 million of funding for food stamps. All of these food stamps go to immigrants who have come to the country and who now have legal status. We had, through the welfare reform bill, eliminated these benefits in a bill which passed both Houses of Congress overwhelmingly and, by the way, is, in terms of the public's mind, the most popular bill that we have passed in the

last 3 years. This bill, in a provision that was voted on in neither House of Congress, overturns a substantial portion of our welfare reform bill and gives \$818 million of food stamps to immigrants.

The bill also sets up a brand new funding mechanism for the Fund for Rural America and provides a \$100 million entitlement, which spends out very slowly, but it ultimately spends out every penny of \$100 million. So we now have four entitlement programs in a simple bill that set out to fund ag research. And every program that becomes an entitlement, since we are under a spending cap on discretionary spending—every penny that would have been spent on these programs is now free to spend on other programs. So, in addition to creating four new entitlement programs, we have, in this bill, broken our commitment to limit the growth of discretionary spending, because we have taken discretionary programs and funded them as entitlements, so that now new spending can occur in the discretionary area.

The biggest problem with the bill is it puts a great big neon sign on the border of the United States of America, and the neon sign says: "Come to America and get welfare. We have a welfare office on every corner." That is the biggest problem with this bill.

I remind my colleagues that when a Member of the minority tried to reduce the level of immigration, I helped lead the effort to kill limiting legal immigration. I believe in legal immigration. I do not believe America is full. I don't want to tear down the Statue of Liberty. The story of the immigrant is the story of America, and I don't think that story is finished telling. I believe that we need to let people with a new vision and new energy come to America as long as they don't violate our laws and they come legally, but I want them to come with their sleeves rolled up ready to go to work, rather than with their hands held out going on welfare.

I will offer a motion to recommit with instructions at 2:15 p.m. That is a very simple motion. All it says is one little provision in this bill, which I think is a relatively minor cost, because we are scoring the bill over 5 years, but it is clearly the most destructive element in this bill, and that is we have an element in this bill that says that no matter how far in the future you come to America, if you come 75 or 100 years from now, under the provisions of this bill, if you come as a refugee, you can get food stamps for 7 years. That is a new provision of law in place in this conference report.

It is a provision where we are moving in exactly the opposite direction of the welfare reform bill, and we now make it permanent law that anyone who comes to America in the future as a refugee can be guaranteed they are going to be able to apply for and get almost immediately 7 years of food stamps.

Now, look, my concern is adverse selection. My concern is that we are going to be attracting people to come to America to go on welfare. I think it is a destructive policy to have active enticements to draw people to America for the purpose of going on welfare rather than for the purpose of going to work.

I don't have any doubt that this provision will affect the decision of people to come to America to try to live off the fruits of someone else's labor. There are millions of people who go to bed every night dreaming the American dream. They want to come to America. They want to share what we have shared. Many Members of the Senate are Members whose grandfathers and grandmothers or great grandfathers and great grandmothers came to America looking for opportunity. I don't believe that process should end. But I think it is suicidal for a nation to set up procedures that attract people to come to its shores, not with a dream of opportunity, not with a dream of achievement, but with a dream of benefiting from the fruits of someone else's labor.

My wife's grandfather came to this country from Korea. He didn't know the language. He didn't know a single soul here. He certainly did not come here looking for welfare or food stamps. He came here looking for opportunity and freedom, and he found both.

From the period of the Civil War to the turn of the century, we had 20 million people come to America, most of them desperately poor. But they came here with willing hands and willing hearts, they rolled up their sleeves, and they built a great nation in the process.

My strong objection to the provisions in this bill really boils down to a series of things: Should we be creating four new permanent, mandatory entitlement programs? I say no. And secondly, should we be changing the law to say to people all over the world, "Come to America and we will give you 7 years of food stamps"? I want people to come to America, but I want them to come to work.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUGAR). The time of the Senator from Texas has expired.

The Senator from Iowa is recognized for 10 minutes under the previous order.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I was trying to listen to the remarks of the Senator from Texas. It is hard to know where to begin to correct the mistakes that he made in his statements because there were so many.

First of all, I say to the Senator from Texas that this was not a \$500 million bill when it started. As a matter of fact, when it passed the Senate, it was a \$1.3 billion bill and, in fact, it passed unanimously, so the Senator from Texas obviously voted for it.

Secondly, I also point out that crop insurance has always been a manda-

tory program—always. In 1996, a small portion of it was made discretionary, but the basis of crop insurance has always been mandatory. So this is not some change in that program.

Thirdly, I tell the Senator from Texas that food stamps has always been a part of this bill. It was a part of this bill when it passed our committee, and it was a part of the bill when it passed the Senate. Food stamps was used as an offset to pay for the research portion of the bill. So it was a part of the bill as an offset. The administration said if we are going to use it as an offset, we had to replace some of the nutrition programs, which I will get to.

I also point out that the Senate-passed bill had nutrition provisions in it. It was not just a research bill, as the Senator from Texas has said. It had a provision in there to expand some child nutrition programs with an expanded breakfast grant program. That was taken out in conference, but it was in the Senate-passed bill.

Lastly, I point out that in terms of the mandatory programs the Senator is talking about, the Fund for Rural America was part of the bill as passed in October, for which the Senator voted. It was in the bill at \$300 million. Now it is only \$100 million. So if the Senator from Texas supported it at \$300 million, he shouldn't be too upset that it is now at \$100 million. I wanted to make those corrections in the RECORD.

I made my opening statement yesterday on the bill itself in terms of the important research and crop insurance provisions that are in it. Again, I commend my chairman, Senator LUGAR, for all of his hard work in getting the whole research program revamped and restructured to meet the needs of the next century. Senator LUGAR has been a leader in this effort. I was pleased to join him, and, again, I thank Senator LUGAR for his close cooperation and for working together to get a really good research bill passed.

I also commend Senator LUGAR for his leadership in getting the necessary wherewithal to extend our Crop Insurance Program for the next 5 years. I daresay, without his strong leadership, we would not have the provisions that our farmers could rely on for their crop insurance this year.

Again, if, in fact, this motion to recommit is successful, that is the end of this bill. Make no mistake about it, this is not just some motion to recommit to change a little bit. This is a motion to recommit to kill this bill. If this goes back to conference, I don't know that the votes are there to take out the food stamp provisions. Even if they are, it will never pass the House of Representatives, and certainly the Senator from Texas knows that. This is a careful compromise, a careful balance that was worked out in this bill.

Let me get to the issue of the food stamps themselves. The Senator says it is like putting a big neon sign out there, "Come to America." Well, let us take a look at that.

What are we doing in this bill? What we are saying is that for refugees and asylees from religious persecution and political persecution, who cannot exist in their homelands because they are going to be tortured or killed, we say to them that if you come to America under a quota—we have a quota every year; not every refugee gets into this country; we have a quota—but if you get in under that quota, right now as a refugee you are eligible for food stamps and Medicaid and SSI. You are eligible for food stamps for the first 5 years, but you are not after that. And so what it says is that you can come in, you can get Medicaid, you can get SSI for up to 7 years, but you cannot get food stamps after 5 years. As a refugee, it takes 4 years and 9 months to be able to apply for citizenship. We know that, because of the backlog at INS, it takes at least 2 more years, maybe 3 years to get full citizenship.

Let me also point out something else. These food stamps are not automatic. It does not mean because you are a refugee and you are here that you get food stamps. No. You still have to meet the requirements, the work requirements and the income requirements, to be able to qualify for food stamps like anyone else. So we are not talking about automatic food stamps.

The 5-year period, the Senator is correct, was set in the welfare reform bill. But it did provide an exception for refugees and persons granted asylum. They would be able to receive food stamps for 5 years.

In the Balanced Budget Act that we passed last year, we extended that for the elderly, the disabled, and the children of legal immigrants who were here in 1996. And then we looked at what we did. We looked at the 5-year period and said, this is unrealistic because a refugee who is here, as I said, has to be here 4 years and 9 months—and it takes 3, sometimes 4 more years to become a citizen. And it is impossible for a refugee to complete the citizenship process in less than 7 years.

As I said, the Balanced Budget Act last year provided that in the case of Medicaid and SSI, refugees and asylees would be eligible to receive benefits for up to 7 years if they qualify. Not automatic. There is no neon sign. It says, if you qualify.

There was bipartisan agreement on this point. Food stamps were not included because that bill came out of the Finance Committee, and food stamps is not under the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee. They are under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee. And that is why we had to fix it here.

Let me read from a letter from the Council of Jewish Federations that came to our office just today asking that we oppose Senator GRAMM's motion. Let me just read one paragraph. It says:

The welfare law provided a 5 year exemption from the bar on food stamps for refugees and asylees because Congress acknowledged

that these individuals typically come to the U.S. with few, if any, resources. They have no sponsors to rely on and may have difficulty working because of disabilities. Those that can work may find that the training and skills they gained in their home countries are inadequate for most jobs here. As a result, many start in low paying jobs [so] they need food stamps to get an adequate diet.

That is just it. These are refugees and asylees. They do not have sponsors. A lot of them come with a shirt on their back. Let me give you one example. Mr. Wang Dan, the young Chinese man who we have all been reading about, who has now come to this country, came with a shirt on his back. We know how he was persecuted and imprisoned in China. What this amendment says to Wang Dan is, OK, up to 5 years, if you fall on hard times—you have to otherwise qualify; you do not automatically get food stamps—but otherwise if you fall on hard times, yes, you can get some food stamps. But after 5 years—you have worked here; you have worked hard; you have applied for citizenship; it is in the bill; you are going to become a citizen in 2 or 3 years—all of a sudden you lose your job, you get sick, you fall on some hard times, sorry, no food stamps. Is that a neon sign? Not in any way. Not in any way.

That is why, Mr. President, we have this letter from the Council of Jewish Federations, which I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD, and also a letter from John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, also asking us to support the restoration of food stamp eligibility in this bill.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

COUNCIL OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS,
New York, NY, May 12, 1998.

DEAR SENATOR: This morning, Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX) is expected to offer a motion to recommit the *Conference Report on the Agriculture Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act, S. 1150*, with instructions to limit the provision extending food stamps for asylees and refugees from 5 to 7 years to only those individuals who were in the country prior to August 22, 1996. On behalf of the Council of Jewish Federations, I am asking that you oppose Senator Gramm's motion.

Senator Gramm's motion would impose undue hardship on people who have been forced to flee persecution in their homelands. These are people who were persecuted, and in some cases tortured, for their political or religious beliefs. In their homelands, they were subjected to persecution ranging from harassment to beatings and job loss to having their homes burnt down. The U.S. has a long history of providing a "safe haven" to refugees and asylees and Congress has repeatedly stood up in support of this tradition.

The welfare law provided a 5 year exemption from the bar on food stamps for refugees and asylees because Congress acknowledged that these individuals typically come to the U.S. with few, if any, resources. They have no sponsors to rely on and may have difficulty working because of disabilities. Those that can work may find that the training and skills they gained in their home countries are inadequate for most jobs here.

As a result, many start in low paying jobs where they need food stamps to get an adequate diet.

Congress set the exemption at 5 years to correspond roughly with the earliest date that most refugees and asylees can apply to become a U.S. citizen. This time-line has proven to be unrealistic because of the backlog in processing naturalization applications. In many INS offices, it may take over 2 years from the date of application to a person's naturalization ceremony. If refugees and asylees are left without access to food stamps after 5 years, they would be punished and left without any nutritional support because of government inefficiency.

For these reasons, I again urge you to oppose Senator Gramm's motion to recommit the S. 1150 to the conference committee.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

DIANA AVIV,
Associate Executive Vice President
for Public Policy.

OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL,
New York, NY, April 29, 1998.

Hon. ALFONSE M. D'AMATO,
U.S. Senate, Hart Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR D'AMATO: I write to request your support for making legal immigrants once again eligible for food stamps and restoring \$818 million in Food Stamp benefits. This would permit 250,000 children, elderly and disabled persons and refugees to seek Food Stamp assistance if they are in need. I am told that the provisions to do this are contained in the conference Report on S. 1150/H.R. 2534, the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reauthorization Act of 1997.

Since 1984, as Archbishop of New York, I have been privileged to assist immigrants from almost every country in the world. These many immigrants have enriched the Catholic Church of New York and other churches, just as they have enriched the New York metropolitan area. (In our Catholic churches alone, every Sunday our Divine Services are held in 30 different languages.) From my own experience I know those who migrate to the United States today are essentially no different from our parents and grandparents who came to America fifty or a hundred years ago. The vast majority of immigrants are individuals who come to this country seeking opportunity for themselves and their families. Unfortunately some immigrants—just as those born in this country—fall on hard times.

Under the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Act, legal immigrants needing assistance to feed themselves are ineligible for support from the very program their tax dollars help fund. Many are now forced to find emergency and unstable ways to feed themselves and their families. Catholic Charities has been supporting an emergency ecumenical food pantry in the Washington Heights section of New York City—the home and hope of so many newly arriving Dominican immigrants. During the past year, the number of those served at this pantry has doubled—at least in part due to the changes in the 1996 laws. While we try to treat those who come to the pantry with dignity, the availability of food stamps to tide people over the rough times is much more dignified than having mothers and children line up in the street at food pantries and soup kitchens.

I urge you to take this opportunity to ameliorate some of the more severe impacts of that 1996 legislation by supporting the restoration of food stamp eligibility for legal immigrants.

With gratitude for your consideration, and
Faithfully in Christ,

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR,
Archbishop of New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. HARKIN. It is the fair and decent thing to do. Let us not kill this bill because of doing the fair and decent thing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas is now recognized, under previous order, for 10 minutes.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of the conference report to the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Act of 1998. I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the distinguished chairman. This is going to be the most important bill to be passed in the 105th Congress in relation to agriculture. I commend the chairman, the ranking member, and the members of the conference for their efforts in reaching what I consider to be a good and a very bipartisan bill.

This bill has been in the making for 2 years. Due to time constraints and the need to more thoroughly evaluate the future direction of agricultural research, these programs, the research programs, were not dealt with in the new farm bill back in 1996. But we promised our farmers and our ranchers, all of us involved in agriculture, all of the land grant universities and consumers, that Congress would move to complete this important piece of the ag policy puzzle as soon as possible.

After 2 long years, we will soon vote to "reform" our agriculture research programs. We will not only vote to extend these programs and commit funds to feed America, and a very troubled and hungry world, but to reform them as well to make them more competitive. We are also going to provide important funding for crop insurance and rural development and, yes, limited food stamp benefits to a specified group of legal immigrants.

The distinguished chairman, the distinguished ranking minority member, and the distinguished Senator from Texas have talked about that at length. I am going to try to briefly address the importance of funding in each of these areas.

First of all, this bill provides \$600 million in new funding for agriculture research. Why is that important? Mr. President, in the last several decades we have seen the population double in this world, and yet we continue to feed this country and, as I have said before, a troubled and hungry world on the same amount of ground. That is a modern miracle. People used to get peace prizes for that. And the main reason is agriculture research. When we passed that new farm bill, producers were promised that funding would be provided to help develop new crops, higher yields and stronger resistance to disease and pests.

In recent weeks, we have heard our colleagues from the northern plains

discuss the problems caused by wheat scab. This bill provides funding for research on fighting this disease that has ravaged the wheat crop in many areas of the northern plains.

Let us talk about food safety. We have heard an awful lot of comment in the press and concern—understandable concern—about E. coli. This bill provides funding for research on the implementation of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Systems (HACCP). It addresses the problem of E. coli.

The bill provides funding for important research into discovering and analyzing trade barriers that prohibit the movement of U.S. ag products on the world market. With the Asian flu today, and our markets declining, nothing could be more important. This research will provide important information to help us move toward these goals in regard to becoming much more market oriented and competitive.

Let me talk about the environment. The one thing that agriculture can do through precision agriculture is to contribute to being more and better stewards of the soil and the environment. Precision agriculture will become one of the most important tools available to producers in the future. It allows them to protect the environment by using satellite technology to determine the proper rates of pesticide and fertilizer applications to the square foot. This has implications all over the world.

I am pleased also that this bill will provide important funding for the Federal Crop Insurance Program. The Crop Insurance Program is currently facing a \$200 million funding shortfall in each of the coming 5 years.

Let me just say that this lack of funding is a "train wreck" waiting to happen for American agriculture. Without full funding of this program, farmers could face cancellation of hundreds of thousands of crop insurance policies. Let me repeat that. Hundreds of thousands of farmers, this spring, are facing the cancellation of their crop insurance. That would be devastating.

Obviously, many farmers are required to maintain their crop insurance coverage in order to obtain loans from their rural banks. Without crop insurance policies backing these loans, many loans would be recalled, and it could send agriculture into a credit and financing crisis. Farmers and ranchers were also promised increased access to viable risk management tools with the passage of the 1996 farm bill. Crop insurance ranks at the top of the list of these important and necessary tools.

This bill provides approximately \$500 million in new funding for crop insurance over the next 5 years. It also makes internal changes in the program. This \$1 billion in combined funding changes solves the funding shortfall in the program and ensures producers access to adequate crop insurance.

Are all the changes made that we need to make in regard to crop insur-

ance? No. There are changes and reforms that are still needed in the program. With the most important issue facing us—the funding shortfall—now solved, the chairman and I, Senator KERREY, and others, in a bipartisan way, will confront this, and we will work to achieve the needed crop insurance reform in the next session of Congress.

Rather than going into the food stamp issue, which the chairman has addressed, Senator GRAMM expressed his concern, and the distinguished ranking member, Senator HARKIN, has addressed, I will go on and point out several other important facts in regard to this bill.

Well, let me say this in regard to food stamps. The very first thing we did in the House Agriculture Committee 3 years ago, when we started to address the farm bill, was take up the issue of food stamps. That is the first hearing we had. Billions and billions of dollars were being spent on food stamps—a program out of control and obviously in need of reform. Working with the distinguished chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and others, we had hearings. We exposed \$3 billion to \$5 billion in fraud and abuse and organized crime in the program. We instilled reforms, and we saved \$23 billion to \$24 billion, plus \$10 billion in regard to savings with the farm commodity programs. There isn't any other segment of Government that has gone through that kind of savings. No member of any committee of this Senate or of the House previously has ever achieved those kinds of significant cuts and reform in the Food Stamp Program or any other program. So the chairman is right. We would like to think we know a little bit about it.

The 1996 welfare reforms eliminated benefits from 800,000 to 950,000 to illegal immigrants. I know that. This bill extends the benefits back to children, elderly, and the disabled who were in the country before August 22 of 1996. It also extends benefits to refugees and asylees who may have entered after the August 22 date. Benefits will be returned to approximately 250,000 people—not 900,000, but 250,000 people. The trend line is down in regard to refugees.

I point out that a refugee is defined as "a person who is fleeing because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and who is of special humanitarian concern to the United States."

With all due respect, I don't think that is a beacon. I think they are fleeing, and I think it is certainly within the boundaries of the United States and what the Statue of Liberty is all about that we consider that. There is a cap. Most of the European numbers are used largely for Soviet, religious minorities, and Bosnians. The East Asian

numbers are for former Vietnamese re-education camp detainees, and Laotians. As I have indicated, these numbers are down. It has gone from 100,000 in 1980 to 75,000 in 1998.

In closing, let me say this. This agriculture research bill and this crop insurance bill will likely be the most important piece of legislation we pass for our farmers and ranchers during the 105th Congress.

During the debate on the 1996 farm bill, we promised our farmers, ranchers, and researchers, who depend on the markets, a more market-oriented agriculture. We promised to get the Government out of our decisionmaking, no longer do you put the seed in the ground as dictated by Washington. In return for less government support, we said we would provide the research and the risk management tools. That was a promise. We will endanger the significant reforms that we made in the new farm bill if this bill is not passed.

Let me make one other observation. The amendment by the distinguished Senator from Texas to recommit is, in fact, a killer amendment; \$1.7 billion in regards to the way that States are administering the program, based on the reform we passed, will disappear. We do not have the money in the appropriations bill to pay for the research or the crop insurance, and we will face an agriculture crisis.

Mr. President, during the debate on the 1996 Farm bill, we promised our farmers, ranchers, and researchers that we would pass this bill and provide the tools needed to feed a troubled and hungry world. It is unconscionable that at a time when producers are facing low commodity prices, reduced international markets due to the Asian Crisis, and new crop diseases, this bill has languished. The tools included in this bill allow producers and researchers to directly address these issues.

I applaud and thank the Chairman, ranking member, and the greater majority of the members of the Agriculture Committee for their work on this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. ROBERTS. I urge my colleagues to oppose the motion to recommit and support the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi has 5 minutes.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join the distinguished chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Senator LUGAR from Indiana, and my good friend from Kansas, the distinguished Senator who was formerly chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, in asking the Senate today to support this conference report.

Senators may remember that when the 1996 farm bill was written, it reauthorized agriculture research programs for only 1 year. There was included in the committee report a suggestion that there be a thorough reevaluation made by the committees of jurisdiction of

the way the Department of Agriculture awarded grants to colleges and universities around the country and funded research programs at Agricultural Research Service facilities. That study was undertaken throughout 1997. I think it began in March of last year. The committee held a series of hearings and reviewed suggestions and options for improving these programs. This conference report is the product of that study and that carefully developed improvement to the Agricultural Research Service programs that are funded by the Department of Agriculture.

I am convinced that we will do a better job under this conference report of identifying the priorities in production agriculture, in food production, and in management of our resources in agriculture than we ever have before under the way we were handling the funding of these programs.

That is the driving force behind this conference report. The reason it is so important for the Senate to approve this conference report is that it puts this in place now.

Mr. President, if that were all this legislation accomplished, some may say that this legislation is unnecessary, but it does more. It also provides \$600 million over the next five years for new competitive agricultural research grants at federal laboratories and colleges and universities.

Our appropriations process is beginning at this point. We have the job of allocating, under the discretionary funding allocations that our appropriations subcommittee will receive, funds for these agriculture research programs. With the guidance of this legislation, it will be a much more coherent process and an orderly process, and I can't contemplate what a mess we would be in if this conference report were not agreed to.

Under current law, about \$200 million of the delivery expenses for catastrophic crop insurance must be provided annually in the agriculture appropriations bill. This legislation would provide full mandatory funding for those expenses over the next five years. This conversion from discretionary to mandatory spending will ensure that farmers will not have to be concerned with the uncertainty of annual funding bills and whether catastrophic crop insurance protection will be available in the coming growing season.

In addition to the support this bill has from the agriculture community, it also enjoys support from those interested in the provisions which will bring parity between the Food Stamp Program and the Supplemental Security Income Program for those immigrants legally residing in the United States. This was an important component of the compromise we reached with the House of Representatives.

This bill has received support from almost every sector of agriculture. I ask unanimous consent that a letter I received from over 100 organizations,

colleges and universities in support of the conference agreement be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

MAY 4, 1998.

Hon. THAD COCHRAN,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR COCHRAN: We are writing to ask you to vote "yes" on the conference report for S. 1150, the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, when it is considered on the floor. This legislation has succeeded in balancing several competing interests and will help prepare the agriculture and food industries for the challenges in the next Century.

This conference report addresses a number of issues that are vitally important to producers, processors, and consumers of food and fiber. The bill provides funding for agricultural research and rural development programs. It provides funding for crop insurance that otherwise will create a severe strain on discretionary budget accounts. Finally, the legislation restores food stamp benefits for some legal immigrants. These funds are fully offset, and the bill is budget neutral.

The House and Senate Committees on Agriculture have worked long and diligently developing this much needed legislation. We believe they have done a remarkable job, and we thank them for their accomplishments.

We respectfully request your assistance in passage of this important legislation. Its impact on the future of our nation will be significant.

Sincerely,

Alabama Farmers Federation.
American Farm Bureau Federation.
American Beekeeping Federation.
American Honey Producers Association.
American Sheep Industry Association.
American Soybean Association.
Grocery Manufacturers of America.
National Association of Wheat Growers.
National Barley Growers Association.
National Broiler Council.
National Cattlemen's Beef Association.
National Corn Growers Association.
National Cotton Council.
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.
National Farmers Union.
National Food Processors Association.
National Grain Sorghum Producers.
National Milk Producers Federation.
National Peanut Growers Group.
National Pork Producers Council.
USA Rice Federation.
American Association of Crop Insurers.
American Bankers Association.
American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.
Crop Insurance Agents of America.
Farm Credit Council.
Independent Bankers Association of America.
Norwest Corporation.
Norwest Ag Credit.
Rural Community Insurance Services.
Agricultural Research Institute.
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges.
American Phytopathological Society.
American Society of Agronomy.
American Society of Animal Science.
American Society of Plant Physiologists.
American Veterinary Medical Association.
Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions.
Council of Scientific Society Presidents.
Council on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics.
Entomological Society of America.
Crop Science Society of America.

Federalation of American Societies of Food Animal Sciences.

Illinois Council for Food & Agriculture Research.

Society of Nematologists.

Soil Science Society of America.

Weed Science Society of America.

Alabama A&M University, School of Agriculture & Home Economics.

University of Alaska, Fairbanks, College of Natural Resource Development & Management.

Alcorn State University, School of Agriculture.

University of Arizona, College of Agriculture.

University of Arkansas, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences.

University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, College of Agriculture and Home Economics.

Auburn University, College of Agriculture.

University of California Systemwide, Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

Clemson University, Public Service & Agriculture.

Colorado State University, College of Agricultural Sciences.

University of Connecticut, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

Cornell University, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

Delaware State University, School of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Family & Consumer Sciences.

University of Delaware, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

Florida A&M University, College of Engineering Sciences, Technology & Agriculture.

University of Florida Agriculture & Natural Resources.

Fort Valley State University, School of Agriculture.

University of Georgia, College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences.

University of Guam, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

University of Hawaii at Manoa, College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources.

University of Idaho, College of Agriculture.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences.

Iowa State University, College of Agriculture.

Kentucky State University, Land-Grant Programs.

University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture.

Langston University, Research and Extension.

Lincoln University, College of Agriculture, Applied Sciences & Technology.

Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

University of Maine, College of Natural Resources, Forestry & Agriculture.

University of Maryland, College Park, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, School of Agricultural & Natural Science.

University of Massachusetts—Amherst, College of Food & Natural Resources.

Michigan State University, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

University of Minnesota, College of Agricultural, Food & Environmental Sciences.

Mississippi State University, Division of Agriculture, Forestry & Veterinary Medicine.

University of Missouri—Columbia, College of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources.

Montana State University, College of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska, Agriculture & Natural Resources.

University of Nevada, College of Agriculture.

University of New Hampshire, College of Life Sciences & Agriculture.

New Mexico State University, College of Agriculture & Home Economics.

North Carolina A&T State University, School of Agriculture.

North Carolina State University, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

North Dakota State University, College of Agriculture.

Oklahoma State University, Division of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources.

The Ohio State University, College of Food, Agricultural & Environmental Sciences.

Oregon State University, College of Agricultural Sciences.

Pennsylvania State University, College of Agricultural Sciences.

Prairie View A&M University, Department of Agriculture.

Purdue University, School of Agriculture.

University of Rhode Island, College of Resource Development.

Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources.

South Carolina State University, 1890 Research & Extension Programs.

South Dakota State University, College of Agriculture & Biological Sciences.

Southern University A&M College, College of Agriculture and Home Economics.

Tennessee State University, School of Agriculture & Home Economics.

University of Tennessee—Knoxville, College of Agriculture.

Texas A&M University, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

Tuskegee University, School of Agriculture & Home Economics.

Utah State University, College of Agriculture.

University of Vermont, Division of Agriculture, Natural Resources & Extension.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

Virginia State University, School of Agriculture Science & Technology.

Washington State University, College of Agriculture & Home Economics.

West Virginia University, College of Agriculture, Forestry & Consumer Sciences.

University of Wisconsin—Madison, College of Agricultural & Life Sciences.

University of Wyoming, College of Agriculture.

Mr. COCHRAN. So, Mr. President, Senators should know it's very important that the conference report be adopted. It is a good compromise between the Senate and the House. It involves other provisions that have been discussed eloquently and forcefully by my friends who have spoken before me. I urge the Senate to approve this conference report.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, when Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Responsibility Reconciliation Act of 1996, it ended public welfare for most aliens who had not worked to earn their benefits.

The 1997 Balanced Budget Act reversed some of the provisions of that bill by reinstating eligibility for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for disabled and elderly immigrants who were in the country before August 22, 1996, the day the omnibus welfare reform package passed into law. But the act also reinstated SSI for immigrants who were in the country as of August 22, 1996 and become disabled in the future. The SSI program is

fraught with fraud. According to the General Accounting Office (GAO), the Social Security Administration sends out \$27 billion in SSI checks annually. Approximately \$4 billion in checks are sent out erroneously. Immigrants, who make up just 6 percent of the population, currently receive over half the cash benefits from the SSI program.

The agriculture research bill we are debating today restores food stamp eligibility for the elderly and the disabled, and for children, as long as they were in the United States before August 22, 1996. But, the agriculture research bill also includes the restoration of food stamp benefits for all immigrants who were in the country as of August 22, 1996, but who become disabled in the future. The Congress is going to spend approximately \$800 million to restore all of these benefits. The food stamp program, like the SSI program, does not require that an individual have contributed to the Social Security base. And, the food stamp program is also susceptible to fraud and abuse—in a just released GAO report, it is estimated that recipients were overpaid an estimated \$1.5 billion, or 7 percent of the approximately \$22 billion food stamps program. And, that is only the fraud that is quantifiable by the government. The GAO believes there are other forms of fraud in the food stamp program that are too difficult to quantify.

As a result of the 1997 Budget and this bill, those individuals who were in the country and disabled on August 22, 1996 will continue to be eligible for SSI and for food stamps. But, the Congress has to draw the line somewhere. The sponsors of currently healthy immigrants who entered the country before August 22, 1996 should be responsible for those immigrants' care should they fall on hard times. That has always been the law. In fact, since the early part of the century any immigrant who becomes a public charge can actually be removed from the United States.

For those individuals who do become disabled and for whom there is no sponsor support, the Immigration and Naturalization Service already has the authority to waive the normal requirements of becoming a citizen. By becoming a citizen, such individuals would automatically be eligible for SSI and for food stamps should they qualify.

Mr. President, now is not the time to reverse our course on welfare reform, as such reform applies both to our U.S. citizens and to our immigrants. America is a land of immigrants, yes. But, we must not perpetuate dependence on public benefits. Our nation must be one of opportunity for our immigrants, not one that skirts the law by providing a loophole for some immigrants to become dependent on public assistance in the future. The Senate should remove the provisions of the conference report that continue food stamp benefits for immigrants in the future.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, later today, we are voting on a motion by

Senator GRAMM to recommit the conference report on the Agricultural Research bill. I strongly oppose Senator GRAMM's motion.

The 1996 welfare law allows refugees to receive federal benefits, including SSI, Medicaid and food stamps, for their first five years in the United States. It made this exception because refugees and asylum-seekers generally come to the United States with little more than the shirts on their backs after escaping persecution abroad. They have no sponsors. They may have disabilities which make it difficult to work. They need time to get on their feet, and begin to recover from the persecution they fled in their former country.

After five years in the United States, refugees can apply for citizenship. Unfortunately, there are serious backlogs of naturalization applications at INS. In many parts of the country, it takes two years to complete the naturalization process and obtain citizenship—and these backlogs are not expected to go down in the near future. Often, the earliest a refugee will gain citizenship is after seven years in the United States.

As we did last year with SSI and Medicaid, the Agricultural Research bill extends the time that a refugee can receive food stamps from five to seven years. Senator GRAMM wants to deny this extension to refugees who entered the United States after the welfare law was enacted.

If we do not extend this time limit from five to seven years, thousands of refugees who have applied for citizenship could lose food stamps as they wait in the naturalization backlog for their applications to be processed.

This group includes refugees like Dien Nwin, who fled Vietnam in 1992 with his wife and children. Dien fought on the side of the United States during the Vietnam War and was imprisoned in a Communist re-education camp for 9 and-a-half years. He was worked hard and supported his family for over five years. He applied for citizenship, but he's stuck in the backlog.

Now, Dien and his family have fallen on hard times. In the past two years, Dien has developed nasal cancer and lung cancer. He has been unable to work since then, and his family has had to use food stamps to survive. Dien is lucky. He entered the United States before the passage of the welfare bill. Under Senator GRAMM's motion to recommit, Dien would be cut off from receiving food stamps after his initial five years in the United States.

Last year, over 25,000 refugees came to the United States fleeing religious persecution in the Former Soviet Union. These refugees included Jews, Evangelical Christians, Mormons and other religious minorities fleeing the restriction of their religious liberties. Under Senator GRAMM's amendment, these refugees will only be eligible for food stamps for their first five years in the United States. Since refugees can-

not apply for naturalization until they have lived in the United States for five years, there will be a gap in their food stamp eligibility, depending on how long the naturalization backlog is at the time they apply.

The naturalization backlog is expected to increase without an increase in INS funding. Record numbers of legal immigrants are applying for citizenship—more than a million per year. This number is not expected to decrease.

Few actions are a more important part of our time-honored commitment to freedom around the world than opening America's doors to those who are denied freedom and face persecution in their own lands.

Whether it is Vietnamese fleeing communism, Bosnians exiled by ethnic cleansing, Jews from the former Soviet Union fleeing anti-semitism, Burmese seeking safe haven from oppression, or Africans escaping political retribution and genocide, our refugee program stands ready to aid, protect, and resettle those who need our help. Part of such help is ensuring that these refugees' needs are met in their new home in this country. Those needs will not be met if their eligibility for food stamps is not extended to seven years.

I urge my colleagues to oppose Senator GRAMM's motion.

Mr. LUGAR addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I want to summarize our debate—which has been a good one this morning—by saying that it is very important that we act today to pass the conference report. As the distinguished Senator from Mississippi stated eloquently and correctly, failure to do that will throw into chaos farmers who are now planting and who count upon crop insurance, reformed albeit as we have reformed it, as an underlying safety net in the year of El Nino, remarkable weather circumstances, it is unthinkable simply to kick away that safety net through our indifference.

Secondly, Mr. President, the agriculture research, which has been characterized as an entitlement, along with crop insurance and other provisions, of course, is a 5-year program, as is our farm bill program.

We have payments to farmers and Conservation Reserve Program payments for the environment. We have designated \$120 million for vital research which we believe is necessary simply to fight back the pest diseases that are now jeopardizing our growth.

Mr. President, the yield of wheat in our country has been flat in yield per acre over the last 15 years of time. The breakers are not occurring, and we must triple and not have a zero gain.

Finally, let me simply say that there will not be people lined up all over the world trying to get into America to ruin our welfare reform. As a matter of fact, welfare reform has brought about a better America. This bill will help

preserve that in a humane way. Provisions that were made under SSI for income for the very persons who are being talked about today—the elderly, the children, the disabled, and those who have come with a well found sense of persecution to escape torture—will, in fact, be aided in a humane way that I believe all Senators would want to support.

I thank the Chair.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 1997

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 10 minutes of debate equally divided on S. 1046, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1046) to authorize appropriations for fiscal years 1998 and 1999 for the National Science Foundation, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. JEFFORDS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

AMENDMENT NO. 2386

(Purpose: To authorize appropriations for fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000 for the National Science Foundation, and for other purposes)

Mr. JEFFORDS. I understand there is a substitute amendment at the desk. I ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Vermont (Mr. JEFFORDS), for Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. HOLLINGS, Mr. JEFFORDS, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. FRIST, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, and Ms. COLLINS, proposes an amendment numbered 2386.

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

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted.")

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I rise to offer an amendment to the S.1046, the National Science Foundation Authorization Act of 1998. This amendment authorizes the National Science Foundation for a period of three fiscal years, 1998, 1999 and 2000.

I am very pleased to see that this amendment represents a bi-partisan effort by both the Commerce and the Labor Committees. These two Committees share jurisdiction of the National Science Foundation. I would also like to thank the co-sponsors of this amendment, Senators JEFFORDS, HOLLINGS, KENNEDY, FRIST and ROCKEFELLER, for their support of this amendment.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) plays a critical role in the development of much of this country's science and technology infrastructure. Its efforts cover a variety of issues