

that. Now it ensures that websites that facilitate sex trafficking will be held liable and held accountable for their actions.

Backpage.com has now been taken over by Federal authorities. It isn't the only such site in existence, but it is a sign that their ability to profit from trafficking without consequence has come to an end.

GRANT THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FULL EMANCIPATION

(Ms. NORTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, D.C. begins commemorations of the emancipation of slaves in the Nation's Capital 9 months before slavery was abolished elsewhere in the United States. Yet, D.C. residents, 156 years later, still are not free. Congress can overturn local laws nowhere else except in the District, and collects taxes without representation.

The residents of the Nation's Capital have more than paid the price for their citizenship. Most are native-born American citizens. Residents have fought and died in every U.S. war, including the Revolutionary War that created the United States of America.

And D.C. residents rank number one in taxes paid to support the United States Government. We are well within our rights to ask Congress to grant the District of Columbia full emancipation by making the District the 51st State.

NATIONAL RETIREMENT PLANNING WEEK

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of nearly 50 million baby boomers ready for retirement.

This week is National Retirement Planning Week. Let me emphasize two earned benefits that have done more to grant security and peace in retirement than any other: Medicare and Social Security. If future generations are to reap their retirement security, our generation must ensure their solvency. And if we only talk retirement with seniors, we fall seriously short.

Although nearly half of all baby boomers say they have \$100,000 or less saved, and their Social Security is critical to their survival, half of Generation Xers have less than \$10,000 saved. Given the financial pressures on millennials, they could end up in precarious situations.

Congress must show real leadership on this issue; and the somber reality is more Americans than ever are shouldering the burden of financing retirement alone. As a society, Congress also must prioritize financial literacy and education, beginning with young students in schools. We must equip every-

one to start small nest eggs that can grow over the decades into what I call Social Security Plus.

Thank you to the National Retirement Planning Coalition, whose fantastic online resources are available to Americans free of charge. That is the National Retirement Planning Coalition, free of charge, to all Americans. Let's get to work for security for our retirees, not just this generation, but those to come.

□ 1800

HONORING THE LIFE OF VICTOR LINK

(Mr. KIHUEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KIHUEN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to remember the life of Victor Link.

Victor was an intelligent man who had a vast knowledge on many topics. He was the father to his adopted son, Christian, and was engaged to be married to his fiancée, Lynne.

Victor loved music and loved sharing his expertise on craft beers. He attended the Route 91 festival in Las Vegas on October 1.

He often traveled around the country to attend many different music festivals with his fiancée, but he always made sure to make time for friends and family.

His son remembers him as being a very strong role model who had a deep passion for life.

I would like to extend my condolences to Victor's family and friends. Please know that the city of Las Vegas, the State of Nevada, and the entire country grieve with you.

CONGRATULATING THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA CRUZ BANANA SLUGS

(Mr. PANETTA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PANETTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the University of California at Santa Cruz Banana Slugs, specifically, their rocket team, the so-called Rocket Slugs, for not only being selected to compete in NASA's elite Student Launch Week, but for medaling in the Best Rocket Fair Display.

The annual competition in Huntsville, Alabama, allows students to research and develop projects related to NASA's Space Launch System. That is America's deep space exploration rocket that is built to return astronauts to the Moon and possibly even send them to Mars.

Their work is a testament to UC Santa Cruz and team cocaptains Kent Roberts and Zafar Rustamkulov. These students pushed the limits of design and engineering, pushed themselves

through trial and error, and proved that they can push their dreams to the Moon and beyond.

FARM BILL AND NUTRITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the opportunity to be here tonight to join with my colleagues for this Special Order.

Over the past 3 years, the House Agriculture Committee has been diligently working on the next farm bill, which sets agriculture and food policy for our Nation every 5 years.

As chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition, I am pleased that we can discuss this important topic tonight, nutrition, and I want to thank Chairman CONAWAY for his great leadership and commitment putting forward the best farm bill possible.

Tonight, we are here to talk about the nutrition title, specifically the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which we used to call food stamps. SNAP accounts for 80 percent of spending in the farm bill, and it is an important safety net for low-income families to help ensure that no one in America goes hungry when times get tough. Far too many Americans are living in poverty, and many have been for a generation.

There is no worse feeling for a parent than to see their child go without something as basic as food, yet food insecurity exists for so many. That is why, since 2015, the Nutrition Subcommittee has hosted 21 hearings on SNAP. It has heard from more than 80 witnesses on how we can improve the program and work to end hunger in America.

In fiscal year 2017, SNAP provided 42.2 million Americans with food benefits at a cost of \$63.7 billion. That is nearly 21 million households, Mr. Speaker.

In my district, Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District, nearly 35,000 households received SNAP benefits for fiscal year 2015. Thirty percent of those homes have one or more people over the age of 60, and nearly half, 45.9 percent, of those homes have children who are under the age of 18.

What this farm bill does is ensure that SNAP benefits continue to be available for those who truly need the help, especially children, seniors age 60 and older, and the disabled, who represent nearly two-thirds of the program's participants.

Unfortunately, though, many Americans may not have the skills necessary to find a family-sustaining job or may have encountered roadblocks while trying to get ahead. This new farm bill makes a historic investment in work programs so SNAP recipients have a

chance to learn new skills and climb the rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

Now, this investment will equip States with resources to arm participants with the soft skills—job search skills, certifications, and education—needed to succeed in today's economy, truly, on-ramps to opportunity.

Now we have a unique opportunity to expand funding and resources for these life-changing programs by closing loopholes and improving opportunities for individuals who have been marginalized by a lack of employment, education, or, quite frankly, life circumstances. By doing this, SNAP can provide immediate food assistance in the short term, while also helping those in need learn skills to help them permanently escape poverty.

Now, let me be clear. We are not removing anyone from receiving the SNAP benefits. What we are doing is providing the tools necessary to help individuals escape the cycle of poverty. I believe that there are many pathways to success in life, and sometimes we do need that critical safety net to take care of our families and help us get back on our feet.

With a rebounding economy and an increased focus on workforce development, I know we are going to be able to open new economic doors for many, because all Americans deserve no less.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY), the chairman of the Agriculture Committee.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much for allowing me to speak this evening.

Today, we introduced H.R. 2, which is the Agricultural Nutrition Act of 2018. H.R. 1 was the tax bill, and so leadership, the Speaker in particular, believed that this issue is important enough that he gave us that rare opportunity to have a single-digit bill number.

My colleagues will join us tonight at the microphone and we will talk about more of the details, but 3 years ago we began this quest to reform SNAP. We wanted to start with basically as blank a sheet of paper as we could get. We didn't want to be constrained by spending or resources. We just wanted to find the best policy we could possibly get to so it would let us know our guideposts.

We did that. We had it scored. It comes in at a budget-neutral position, which is what our commitment to the broader conference was, and accomplished that on not only SNAP, but also with the rest of the title as well.

We did six listening sessions around the country this past year. Three-hundred-plus good citizens stepped to the microphone to speak to Members of Congress about what was on their heart, what was working with the farm bill, all aspects of it. I specifically remember a young woman who stood at the microphone, incredibly brave young lady, who said: I am the reason that SNAP needs to stay in place.

She said: I was 18 years old, a single mother of a 3-year-old, and I didn't like my future, and I wanted to go to college.

And SNAP and the other benefits that were available, her hard work, her sweat equity, but, yes, our helping hand up allowed her to get a college education.

She became an educator. She then got an advanced degree and is now in administration. She said for her and her daughter, public assistance is now defined by what they do for other folks as opposed to what gets done for them.

That is the success we want to drive. That is how we want to measure SNAP and all of our programs as against a yardstick that says we want to give folks a helping hand up. We want folks to break that cycle of poverty.

I believe that the good policies we put in place with the SNAP program that were released today, as people begin to understand what we are doing and begin to understand a bunch of the misinformation that has been in the public arena over the last several weeks about what we were trying to do, that that will dissipate and our colleagues across both sides of the aisle will see the wisdom of what we are going to do with respect to SNAP.

I am proud of the work that we have done. I am particularly proud of G.T. Thompson's leadership the last year on our Nutrition Subcommittee. He has done incredibly good work, and I am looking forward to him and my other colleagues continuing this process.

The bill we introduced today is a work in progress, and it is not what will get to the President's desk; but we are excited about the process of marking it up in committee, coming to this House floor, having those fulsome conversations with our colleagues about what is working, what is not working, and then getting this to the President's desk once the Senate does their work.

So a great step forward for the Agriculture Committee today. I am proud of the work we have done and look forward to working with my colleagues to get this even further along the path.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership and for leading what has been one of the most transparent processes. The amount of hearings that we have had, over 20 hearings just on nutrition, 80 witnesses—a job well done.

You know, there is a saying that we have always heard. What is it? The doctor knows best. I am pleased to yield to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL), another member of the Agriculture Committee, a physician, who really understands health and healthy nutrition.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for yielding to me today to speak on one of my favorite topics.

Perhaps I look at the importance of SNAP through a different set of lenses than some of my peers who sit among me. I spent nearly the last 30 years as

a physician counseling and advising expecting moms.

Starting a family is a special and scary time for many of my patients. Almost all of them would come to me with a list of questions and problems. And despite the variety of their concerns, many could be solved with proper and improved nutrition.

SNAP assisted many of my patients in providing nutrient-dense foods for my mothers and children. The importance of nutrition in the weeks prior to conception, during pregnancy, while breastfeeding, and within the early years of infancy can never be overestimated.

In the United States, one in eight people identify as being food insecure. To put that into perspective, of the 5,000 babies I delivered, 625 of them are food insecure today. The thought of this, alone, weighs on our hearts and makes them heavy, and that is why I am so proud of this farm bill's nutrition component and why we worked so hard to get it right.

Our farm bill increases nutrition education, incentivizes our SNAP recipients to make healthier choices, and increases access to nutritious foods.

And for those people who live in our Nation's food deserts with limited access to grocery stores, we thought about you, too. We have to incentivize retailers to want to invest in these underserved communities. That is why we have extended and improved the Healthy Food Financing Initiative that gives grants to retailers to open businesses in areas that lack the access to healthy foods.

So I ask you today: How could anyone vote against a bill that looks at the food insecurity problem in this country from so many angles through the eyes of so many people?

We all know that food is health and that, truly, we are what we do eat. This bill will help all Americans become more healthy and to stay more healthy, and that is why I am so proud to support this bill and look forward to its passage, getting it on through the Senate and on to our President to sign.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for being part of this Special Order.

All of the hearings that we had were bipartisan, great bipartisan input into the hearings, and there is nothing in the nutrition title that really hasn't come out as a part of those hearings.

In fact, I know my colleagues, my friends across the aisle, our Democratic members of the committee I have been so honored to work with and be a part of these hearings, they submitted specific priorities for the nutrition title under title IV, and I am proud to say that all those priorities are included within this farm bill.

I now yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. CRAWFORD), a friend of mine, who is also part of our leadership with the Agriculture Committee, a subcommittee chairman, from the First District of Arkansas.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Pennsylvania for doing such a great job on this. I know he has worked really, really hard on it.

We have talked about the number of committee hearings that have been dedicated to just nutrition. That is because the nutrition title of the farm bill accounts for about 80 percent of the total authorization. So it is really important that we get it right.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express support for the Agriculture and Nutrition Act, specifically, the improvements that we are making here in the critical nutrition title under the leadership of my friend Mr. THOMPSON, who has done a fantastic job.

Currently, there is a loophole related to heating and cooling allowances that is often used to artificially increase SNAP benefits. States are given the flexibility under the previous iteration of the SNAP program to use the standard utility allowances for heating and cooling to ease SNAP administration.

Households automatically qualify for the SUA if they receive Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program, it is called the LIHEAP program, payments, if they receive payments from that program. States, in order to increase SNAP benefits, provide LIHEAP payments of just greater than a \$20 minimum threshold, allowing households to qualify for the SUA, thus increasing the SNAP benefits the household receives, even though the household may not have actual heating and cooling expenses.

Our bill requires demonstrated heating or cooling expenses in order to receive a standard allowance for such expenses. We basically removed the automatic availability of the SUA for heating and cooling and ask that households demonstrate actual utility costs to receive the State-determined SUA.

Note that we exempt the elderly from that requirement of documentation, so we will make sure that people understand that they are not being adversely impacted.

My home State of Arkansas is already demonstrating how to implement this practice. In our State, we currently require folks who want to be a part of this program—and, by extension, eligible for SNAP—to demonstrate that they, in fact, have utility bill expenses.

This reform will take what my State is doing and implement it across the entire Nation and ensure that SNAP's initial purpose of helping those who need this program the most is being achieved.

□ 1815

Much of the frustration of my constituents, and many folks across the country, has been about the explosion of enrollees in programs who, quite frankly, don't need the benefits in the first place and are deemed eligible through an administrative shortcut.

It is my hope that more States will see this the same way that my home

State of Arkansas does and realize that Federal resources are not infinite and being responsible stewards of this program serves those who need the serving the most. If we enact this reform, they will always be taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the chairman again for his steadfast leadership and his diligence in all of the hearings that we have had over the last 4 years.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for being a part of this important Special Order tonight, because nutrition matters and farmers feed.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield to a gentleman from another part of our Agriculture Committee leadership from the State of Illinois. He is the chairman of the Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research Subcommittee.

He actually did a great job yesterday convening a briefing where he brought in 4-H leaders from all over the country to share their experiences as a part of that great organization.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS) from the 13th Congressional District.

Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) and all of the colleagues that I see on this floor who are part of the Agriculture Committee team—and we are a team.

We are a team that I got to watch work 4 years ago together to pass a bill that the Congressional Budget Office said was only going to save taxpayers \$23 billion in mandatory spending. As a matter of fact, that was the largest, single spending cut that was projected in my entire freshman term.

Well, they came back over the recent weeks and told us that they were wrong. Those savings have actually been \$111 billion in mandatory spending. This is why good policies matter. The bill that we introduced today is an example of good policies that save taxpayer dollars, but, just as importantly, it helps American families who are trapped in a cycle of poverty.

They have suffered from food insecurity and depend on SNAP to feed themselves and their families; and some of these men and women are capable of working, but they lack the access to adequate skills training to obtain a job that provides meaningful income and a chance to improve their family's future.

We want to change that. Just like we wrote good policy 4 years ago, we have written good policy again because we are going to change that by shifting the antipoverty conversation from one purely focused on benefits to one focused on helping someone climb the economic ladder and developing a strong workforce.

We have created a streamlined, simplified work requirement, paired with meaningful investments in workforce training. This farm bill requires and funds sufficient education and training slots, guaranteeing access to all SNAP

participants subject to being able to work.

We have modernized the components of SNAP employment, education, and training to include assessment and case management, include additional options like supervised job search apprenticeships, time-limited volunteer work, subsidized employment, and financial history.

Last week, Caterpillar, in Decatur, Illinois, hosted an event to recruit more welders and machinists. They have jobs available, but not enough people are trained to fill these skilled jobs.

I visited the Bridgestone tire plant in Bloomington, Illinois, last week, and I heard the same thing. Jobs are available, but there is no one to take them.

Our economy is growing; jobs are growing. We must do more to get people the education and training that they need to take these available, skilled jobs and help themselves and help their families.

Mr. Speaker, I again thank my colleague from Pennsylvania.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership and for joining us here this evening.

One of the things I really love about the Agriculture Committee is, quite frankly, what we do. Everyone eats, nutrition matters, and our Agriculture Committee is represented by Members from all over the country, including Tennessee.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DESJARLAIS), another member of the Agriculture Committee from Tennessee's Fourth Congressional District.

Mr. DesJARLAIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman THOMPSON. We really do appreciate his leadership on this issue and his passion. He spent so much time and effort to get this right, and it is really rare in this country where you can get so many people to come together—especially in these times—and agree on one thing.

But when it comes to work-capable people between age 18 and 59 contributing to the workforce, about 80 percent of Americans agree on this. This is across the aisle. This is Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. It is hard to get people to agree on anything, but this is just such a commonsense, humane thing to do.

I don't fully understand who the 2 in 10 are who would disagree with this. Maybe they are people who are not working who are able-bodied. But at any rate, this is something that is designed to help lift people from poverty, break the cycle of debt, and get people to work and feel good about themselves.

I would urge everyone listening to call their Representatives and their Senators and urge them to support this farm bill because it is well thought out. The time is right. The jobless claims are down in this country, yet there are people all over our districts

who are clamoring to us about the lack of skilled workers.

All throughout Tennessee's Fourth District, there are people asking me: How do we get people to come and work? And here is a solution that we have people who can go out and get good-paying jobs, break the cycle. They are able to work. They are capable of working, but for some reason just haven't reentered the workforce. And, frankly, our government has made it too easy for people not to work. They have made it too comfortable. We have been bad parents.

It is time to do the right thing. We all need to contribute to this country. We have record debts, and getting people back to work is the answer.

But when you hear folks who are opposed to work requirements for people who are able-bodied, I just would ask you to ask them why. It does not help their self-esteem. It does not help their country. It does not help their families. And what we are offering here is an opportunity to work 20 hours a week. If you are still in need of assistance, you will get it. If you don't have the proper training, this will allow you to get training. We are making this mandatory.

So either you are going to become a part of the workforce, you are going to be trained to become part of the workforce, or you are simply going to choose not to work; and, in that case, you might lose your food stamps benefits. But that is the whole point of this, is to help people make the right decision, make good choices; and, again, 80 percent of the country agrees with this across the aisle. So there should be no real controversy on this. There should be no reason that people don't want to support this bill.

It is the right thing to do. It is the right time. There are jobs available. It is just simply a matter of people breaking that cycle, getting out, contributing, and feeling good about themselves again. I really can't understand why we have opposition to this great piece of work that was put together. It is great that it is coming in the form of the farm bill.

I stand in strong support of this and am grateful for the gentleman's work and the work of so many on the committee, and the Members, and the staff to help get people in the right place, back to work, and still protecting and preserving the safety-net program that is vital for so many people.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for being a part of the Agriculture Committee and thank him for his great work on behalf of the folks in Tennessee.

As the gentleman from Tennessee was saying, what we are talking about is, part of the nutrition title is really looking at making improvements to it. We are not really doing anything to people. We want to do things for people. And, quite frankly, for 65 percent of the folks who find themselves in a

situation where they are on the SNAP program, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, I don't want to say nothing is going to change, but it is just going to get better. We are going to get them greater access to healthy foods.

Those are the 65 percent of the folks who are under the age of 18 or over the age of 65, or living with a disability. And so for the 35 percent that find themselves on this program—usually for temporary times—it is because of financial situations. And that is their number one need. They are unemployed, underemployed. Maybe they have been living in poverty for generations.

And, yes, we want to provide that safety net for food, but we want to provide them actually an onramp to opportunity as the gentleman talked about.

We don't force anybody to do anything. If you are able-bodied and you fall within that category, that age of 18 to 59—and I guess if you don't want to take access, take the opportunity for that job training, then you can self-select out of the SNAP program. But why would you want to do that?

What we are investing in, education and training, we are actually guaranteeing a training slot in every State. We are providing the support to the States to be able to do that, to provide—most importantly, I think—case management.

Because case management—the gentleman is a physician as well. I am a rehab therapist and a former manager in rural hospitals, and case management plays an important role helping lead people through the process when they have a time of need. And that is what this bill does.

So from Tennessee to New York, I am really pleased to yield to another member of the Agriculture Committee, representing New York's 19th Congressional District.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. FASO). I thank the gentleman for being a part of the discussion tonight.

Mr. FASO. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank G.T. THOMPSON, my colleague from Pennsylvania, our subcommittee chairman on the Nutrition Subcommittee for his leadership.

G.T. THOMPSON deeply feels about the condition that people have who may be living in poverty, who may be suffering from food insecurity for themselves and their family. And I say to Chairman THOMPSON that it has been a pleasure to serve for the last 15 months under his leadership on the Nutrition Subcommittee.

The reforms that we are seeking to implement in H.R. 2 in the SNAP program, in this 2018 farm bill, are truly intended to assist people out of dependency and into employment.

I have heard from so many employers throughout my district in the Catskills and Hudson Valley and in central New York that they have jobs available, but

they simply can't find qualified people to meet those jobs and to fulfill those responsibilities.

In fact, this morning in the Budget Committee, we had the Director of the Congressional Budget Office before us, and one of the topics that was raised was the fact that there are very low workforce participation rates among able-bodied people between 18 and 65 in our Nation. And this is part of the problem that we have a workforce participation rate nationally of approximately 63 percent.

In a number of the counties that I represent in the 19th Congressional District in New York State, that workforce participation rate for able-bodied, employable people between 18 and 65 hovers at 60 percent or slightly below 60 percent. There are plenty of jobs that are there, but, unfortunately, people do not have the skills, the training, sometimes the work ethic, and the notion of what it means to get up and go to work every day and meet the need of that employer and customers of that employer.

So this is a real serious issue in our country. If we are going to deal with the looming fiscal crisis that we have for mandatory spending programs like Social Security and Medicare, for instance, we need to get more people in the workforce. We need to create more opportunities to give people a hand-up, and not simply a handout.

Now, one of the things that is truly important about this SNAP reform that Chairman THOMPSON and Chairman CONAWAY are leading the way in H.R. 2 on, in this 2018 farm bill, is that we are going to make it easier for people who are on the SNAP program to qualify for the program without having every nickel of any asset that they possibly have to count against their qualification.

So, for instance, this legislation will allow a family on SNAP to have a savings account of up to \$2,000 without that counting against the asset test. Today, that simply isn't the case. So a family that might need money for fixing their car, or having their kids go to the orthodontist or the dentist, or some other kind of family emergency—to buy a washing machine, for instance—they are not even allowed under SNAP's asset test rules to have a \$2,000 savings account. That is wrong, and it is simply an outmoded notion that we have precluded that.

The other thing that I think is very interesting in this proposal, in this reform proposal, is that we are going to raise the asset test on the value of an automobile from about \$4,650 to \$12,000. I represent a rural part of upstate New York. My district is larger than the State of Connecticut. Many times people have to drive 40, 50 miles one way to get to a job.

Well, we can't expect someone who is struggling with difficult economic circumstances for them or their family to be able to qualify for SNAP and have an asset of a vehicle—which they need

desperately to get to work every day—we can't have that asset limited to a \$4,600 vehicle.

□ 1830

So this legislation which Chairman THOMPSON and Chairman CONAWAY are spearheading would raise that vehicle asset test up to \$12,000. So these are logical, rational things. That asset test has been at \$4,650 for many decades now. So these are the kinds of commonsense reforms that are contained within this proposal that I hope that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will pay heed to and carefully study because we welcome their input in this.

But we also know that the American people are demanding that we have reform in these programs and that we encourage and we really bring the job opportunities and the job training counseling to people who are dependent. There are over 3 million people in the SNAP program today who are able-bodied adults, who are capable of working, between 18 and 59, who have no children at home. We know that, in today's economy, many, many parents and many Americans go into the workforce with minor children at home. They are out there working. They are out there pitching in trying to improve the lot for themselves and their families. There is absolutely no reason why an able-bodied adult with no children whatsoever should not be in a work program and should not be required to participate in a State-sanctioned, State-supervised employment counseling and training program.

So these are the things that we are trying to do: increase opportunity, obviously reduce fraud and people who might be benefiting from the program who might be working off the books somewhere but still qualifying for benefits. But that is not the main impetus here. The main impetus is: How are we going to create more opportunity for people who need a hand-up in the economic ladder?

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman THOMPSON so much for leading the way on this. We had numerous hearings and listening sessions, including one in my district in Schoharie County at SUNY Cobleskill. The overwhelming consensus in dealing with the Food Stamp program or SNAP program is that we need to keep it, we need to make sure that people who are on it and who are able to work have the opportunities and are certainly encouraged to move into the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD an article which I wrote in the Albany Times Union which appeared on April 9, 2018, about the SNAP reform and the need to include healthy measures for food but also enhanced work requirements.

[From the Albany Times Union, Apr. 9, 2018]
SNAP MUST INCLUDE WORK, HEALTHY FOOD
MANDATES

(By Rep. John Faso)

With over 42 million Americans—and over 2.8 million New Yorkers—receiving critical

nutrition assistance, it is a self-evident fact that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps people in meaningful ways. SNAP reduces hunger in low income households, and when it provides benefits to families with children, it has been shown to improve health outcomes for those children.

Like any program of this size, SNAP is not without flaws. The program insufficiently promotes self-sufficiency; too many recipients could be working, but are not.

There continues to be too much fraud and abuse in the program, and the program also needs to be much more effective in promoting proper nutrition. Congress will soon reauthorize SNAP as part of the 2018 Farm Bill and now is the time to fix the program. Let's address these issues one at a time.

First, the program needs to better focus on encouraging and helping non-working recipients find and retain employment. While many receiving SNAP benefits do work—and others are seniors, children or disabled, and therefore can't be expected to work—a large group of those currently receiving benefits are neither disabled nor employed. In 2016, there were over 11 million non-disabled people aged 18 through 59 receiving SNAP, who aren't working.

A purpose of benefit programs such as SNAP should be to help people gain self-sufficiency. We would be more successful at reducing systemic hunger and poverty if states required able-bodied adults to participate actively in employment and training programs that put them on a path toward stable employment.

Alternatively, if someone does not wish to participate, they could actively self-select and unenroll from the program. This approach was successful in increasing earnings and reducing poverty in the wake of President Bill Clinton's sweeping welfare reform in the 1990s, and it will work again if applied to SNAP's current entitlement structure.

Second, fraud and the improper use of benefits is still too rampant in the SNAP program. Only in Washington is losing roughly \$650 million per year due to fraud and failures in program integrity considered a "good job" because it is a small percentage of the total amount of taxpayer money spent. That is still \$650 million that is not being used as intended, which is to feed families.

There must be zero tolerance when it comes to fraud and abuse. Hiding income, failing to disclose assets, trafficking benefits or utilizing unscrupulous food vendors are activities we need to stop. Congress needs to allow state and local officials who see this fraud right before their eyes to pursue and penalize this activity.

Finally, the SNAP program is not doing enough to promote nutrition and reduce childhood obesity. Obesity is an issue for far too many American families and childhood obesity in low-income families is growing. The program's title suggests that it promotes healthy and nutritious food options but does nothing to limit the ability to purchase products that no one will argue are part of a healthy diet. Hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of SNAP benefits are spent on sugary beverages, and it's past time that Washington prohibits the use of SNAP benefits to purchase soda. Every dollar not spent on soda can go toward a healthier alternative. While some will contend we are limiting choice for the poor, tax dollars should only pay to encourage healthier choices.

At the same time, we should also fix some of the asset tests for eligibility, such as allowing a recipient to have a car worth over \$12,000 instead of the \$5,000 limit today. If we expect someone to work, they need a reliable vehicle to get to the job. We should also allow a recipient to have savings up to \$2,000, without affecting eligibility.

Over the next decade, SNAP benefits will total more than \$630 billion in taxpayer dollars. We must do more to ensure that we assist able-bodied recipients in joining the job market, while at the same time continuing to assist those for whom nutrition assistance is a necessity.

John Faso, R-Kinderhook, represents the 19th Congressional District.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments.

Mr. Speaker, the timing is good for our approach here, isn't it? We have an economy where, for the first time maybe in 10, 15 years, we see wages rising and we see job creation. Even before this most recent economic surge, I guess for lack of a better word to call it, there are an estimated 5 million jobs that are open and available in the United States. These are jobs that most of them do not require a 4-year degree or a 6-year degree. These are jobs that require some skills-based education, maybe a certification, a specialization. It is kind of perfect with what we are looking at.

There is some confusion that is out there. Some people are saying this is creating a brand new level of bureaucracy. I know for a fact that the people I serve with here wouldn't go for anything that is creating more bureaucracy. The fact is we are actually taking advantage of, first of all, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA. That is our Career Links. That is where people go today, where if they are unemployed or underemployed, they are able to get a job. That is where employers look to find qualified and trained employees. So we are going to be able to utilize that existing infrastructure.

But community colleges, apprenticeships, and private companies that want to engage in training, there are a lot of opportunities out there for this.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER), who is another absolute friend and leader of agriculture. She is a former teacher and leads our chair's Values Action Team which I am proud to be a part of. Representative VICKY HARTZLER represents the Fourth Congressional District of Missouri.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate so much Chairman THOMPSON's leadership on this to provide just a wonderful, wonderful program to help people have that onramp to opportunity. I also appreciate the chairman's heart because I know in the meetings and the opportunities I have had to have conversations with the gentleman how much he cares about people, and he has provided that care to many people.

This is just a wonderful package. The chairman just mentioned that community colleges are going to be involved in this. I just had one of my community colleges in my office this afternoon. We were talking about this very proposal. They are so excited about this because they were emphasizing the point that so many of my colleagues

here tonight have made in that the businesses and the manufacturers in my district and everywhere across this country cannot find enough skilled, able people who can fill these jobs that are out there.

They were sharing that the salaries are really good—really good. As I visit with some of the manufacturers, they say a welder can start at \$60,000 or a truck driver can start at \$60,000 or \$70,000. I was a teacher. I went into education, and I have a bachelor's degree and then went on to get a master's degree. When I was teaching, I never got near close to that. So there is so much opportunity out there. There is such a need.

That is why I am excited about the plan that we have here to help expand the current program we have to give individuals the personalized training that they need to be able to connect with the job.

It is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity. As has been said, as the chairman said, there are 5.9 million jobs sitting there waiting for individuals, yet we have people at home right now who want to fill them, but they just don't have those skills. So we are going to provide that.

I want to share a little bit about what we have done in Missouri so far with this program. The SNAP employment and training in Missouri has operated as a partnership between the University of Missouri Extension, community colleges, and local job boards. MU Extension provides the most extensive interactions with each applicant by providing a coach, training, and wraparound services to support the individual in building the skills necessary to fill open positions in Missouri. Those have included and are including nursing, over-the-road trucking, warehouse logistics and management, and welding, just to name a few. MU Extension's niche component is coaching, helping those with the most barriers like homelessness, lack of transportation, or having no high school diploma to gain the necessary skills to fill the jobs in their community.

MU Extension has focused their efforts on short-term certificate programs or vocation programs to ensure success of those who may not have been successful in the past and who face the greatest challenges to education and employment. This intensive coaching led to a 96.6 percent graduation rate for those participants completing training last year. Those individuals who secured employment report making annualized salaries of between \$20,800 and \$93,600. Can you imagine going from being on public assistance, having SNAP in order to be able to feed your family, going through this program, and getting a job at \$96,000 a year? That is exciting. People are excited about this.

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with one of the participants of this program. His name is Joe. After

spending 10 years in prison, Joe knew he needed a new start. He signed up for an HVAC program using the SNAP employment and training funding. Joe, today, is working full time, and he gets great reviews from his employer. He no longer needs any Federal benefits, and he has the confidence and skills needed to be a productive member of society.

So this bill, the 2018 farm bill, provides this unique opportunity to expand funding for these life-changing programs to ensure all SNAP recipients have access to education and training resources. Not just some, all of them will have access to this training so that they can secure employment.

A major increase in the SNAP employment and training funding will provide States with the vital resources to help their residents break the cycle of poverty.

Smart, commonsense reforms can produce great results like the story I told about Joe, and it can break the cycle of poverty. SNAP employment training currently being implemented across Missouri now can be expanded everywhere. So by supporting this enhanced employment training program, we are augmenting someone's future by supporting them in achieving their goals.

Jobs are available, the need is great, and the time for action is now. Let's help families make their dreams of self-sufficiency a reality.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her enthusiasm for this.

Congratulations to Joe. Actually, that is a great story.

Mrs. HARTZLER. He is a great guy.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, for someone who was incarcerated, that is difficult to overcome; but through the programs, it gave a great example of how that occurs.

Contrast that also with what Mr. FASO from New York was saying about those cliffs, what I refer to as poverty cliffs. We try to incentivize folks to do better for themselves. We are making improvements because right now the way the program is, like most of our programs, if you make a dollar more than the limit, an arbitrary limit, the government pulls the rug out from beneath you.

The fact that we are going after some of those, how much assets you can have and the value of your car—the folks who are most at risk need reliable transportation. I am just really proud that we are addressing all that, and I thank the gentlewoman for being a part of all of this.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ROUZER), who is a great member of the Agriculture Committee from North Carolina's Seventh Congressional District. Congressman DAVE ROUZER is a man I am proud to serve with.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding. It is a great

honor to be with the gentleman here tonight, and I commend him for his great leadership on this issue.

This really, really is a great, great bill. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly referred to as SNAP, as we all know it, is a nationwide food assistance program that provides a nutritional safety net for low-income families and individuals who meet certain eligibility requirements.

Now, I think the vast majority of Americans would agree that, if you work, you should be better off than if you don't work. Our farm bill makes commonsense reforms to ensure that recipients of these benefits, those who are perfectly capable of work, have a pathway to upward mobility, can get good jobs, and ultimately can use their God-given talents to achieve a very rewarding career. That is what this is all about.

As we drafted this farm bill, we stayed focused on providing those who find themselves in unfortunate circumstances the ability to lift themselves up and the ability to succeed and contribute to society.

Another aspect of the farm bill I want to highlight is in the nutrition title as well. It provides assistance to low-income seniors through the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. This vital program increases the consumption of good quality food by expanding, developing, and aiding in the development and expansion of domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs.

It does so by providing seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for eligible foods such as fruits, vegetables, honey, and fresh-cut herbs.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the commonsense reforms included in the 2018 farm bill among many, many more. I hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will take the time to really study and understand what these reforms will mean to our farm families, rural America, and the upward mobility created for those individuals and families in this country who need a helping hand.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I think we are going to see many coming out in favor of this proposed farm bill and specifically the nutrition title.

Two articles came out today. The first one is from USA Today entitled, "Food-Stamp Work Requirements Will Lift Americans Out of Poverty," by our own agriculture chairman, Mike Conaway. He was joined by Lee Bowes who is the CEO of America Works of New York which is a training placement company. Also, there is an article that was published in The Wall Street Journal entitled: "Working on Food Stamps: A House GOP reform would help the able-bodied get off the dole."

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD these two articles.

[Apr. 12, 2018]

FOOD-STAMP WORK REQUIREMENTS WILL LIFT AMERICANS OUT OF POVERTY

(By Mike Conaway and Lee Bowes)

There is a fundamental link between poverty and work.

Individuals who hold full-time employment (<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/demo/P60-259.pdf>) are 10 times less likely to be poor than people who are out of work during at least part of the year.

But not every American has the skills and training needed to hold full-time employment.

Teaching these skills takes time and resources, which is why for so long our nation has taken a piecemeal approach to supporting work and training to help move people out of poverty. Instead, we've focused the conversation on poverty around benefits—the dollars spent and the meals served.

Benefits are critically important and serve a vital role in the safety net aimed at catching people if they should fall into poverty. But equally important is a focus on helping these same people climb back out of poverty.

That point is underscored by a 2016 poll from the American Enterprise Institute and the Los Angeles Times. Forty-one percent of the poor people included in the survey viewed their circumstances as temporary (<http://www.aei.org/publication/2016-poverty-survey/>).

People want to believe the American dream is attainable.

That's why we need to shift the conversation on poverty in this country from one focused purely on benefits to one about improving futures.

And as the House Agriculture Committee releases its new farm bill (<https://agriculture.house.gov/news/documentquery.aspx?IssueID=14904>)—legislation that governs the policy for our nation's nutrition programs—that is precisely what we aim to do.

Our proposal is straightforward: help those on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) who are work-capable find employment to support their households.

Under this proposal, work-capable SNAP recipients will need to work for at least 20 hours per week. That can take a variety of forms they can work, participate in a work program, or participate in a SNAP employment and training (E&T) program. This bill makes a significant investment in training and case management to guarantee access to an E&T slot to anyone who wants one.

But to ensure this investment yields results, we're also making these work requirements mandatory. No more loopholes that create disincentives to work.

We are equipping states with resources to arm participants with the skills, certifications and education needed to succeed in today's economy.

And that's a critical point, because our economy is supporting more jobs and a higher standard of living for ALL Americans. Jobs that were once unavailable are now at an individuals' fingertips if aided with the proper training and skill set.

SNAP recipients want to be beneficiaries of this economic growth. They want to take advantage of opportunities and meet the needs of our nation's businesses.

It is also important to note that for nearly two-thirds of SNAP recipients (<https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds-rules>) who are currently exempt from work-related programs, nothing will change. That group includes seniors, those who are mentally or physically disabled, children and various other individuals who would not be subject to our proposed modifications to work.

But for work-capable adults, if they want to receive benefits, they'll be expected to work. And if they don't work, they are self-selecting to remove themselves from the program.

People will try to demonize what we are doing here and say that this proposal is too much, too fast, too soon.

They will try to claim that this bill is about kicking people out of the program to save money. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

Under this work proposal, only an individual who chooses not to participate in a guaranteed E&T slot will lose eligibility for SNAP.

Others will claim that these modifications aren't needed because most SNAP recipients who can work, do work (<https://www.cbpp.org/snap-households-with-working-age-non-disabled-adults-have-high-work-rates-6>). And under our bill those individuals can have the peace of mind that their benefits will not be compromised.

While critics will say SNAP isn't meant to be a jobs program, we believe these modifications can support nutrition for families in need while also creating new opportunities that emphasize work and independence and provide the resources needed to move people forward.

Advocating for the status quo has never and will never lift someone out of poverty.

That's why we need to begin to define success differently—not by how many people we serve, but rather how many people we aid in climbing the economic ladder.

[Apr. 11, 2018]

WORKING ON FOOD STAMPS

(By The Editorial Board)

A common refrain from businesses is that they can't find enough workers. The unemployment rate is a low 4.1%, but one reason for the shortage are government benefits that corrode a culture of work. So credit to House Republicans for trying to fix disincentives in food stamps amid what are sure to be nasty and dishonest attacks.

House Agriculture Chairman Mike Conaway on Thursday will introduce a farm bill, though food stamps absorb much of the cost. More than 40 million Americans are in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the official name for food stamps, and the figure is up from about 17 million in 2000. The size of the benefits has also increased, and the program cost has exploded to about \$70 billion a year.

More Americans need assistance during recessions like 2008, but the question is why so many have stayed on food stamps even amid the long expansion. The American Enterprise Institute's Robert Doar in 2014 compared the post-2008 recovery to the recession in the early 1980s. If folks had left the program at similar rates to the 1980s, food stamps would have had 36 million beneficiaries by 2013. Instead there were 47.6 million.

One result is that many Americans haven't returned to the labor force. Enter the House's first proposal: A 20 hours a week work requirement for able-bodied adults, ages 18 through 59. This usually elicits panic about child labor or single moms, but the requirement does not apply to seniors, children, the disabled, or anyone who cares for a child under six or is pregnant. That exemption covers roughly two-thirds of everyone on food stamps.

The folks subject to the work rule have many ways to satisfy the requirement, including apprenticeships that could contribute to higher earnings later. States will have to offer access to training programs, which can also count as work. The bill stipulates case management and other techniques to help people transition off assistance.

Food stamps already has a de minimis work rule for some participants, but states have applied for waivers and exemptions that have diluted it. Yet the results of real welfare work requirements in states have been encouraging, including former Governor Sam Brownback's reform in Kansas. A Foundation for Government Accountability paper last year noted that Kansas tracked 6,000 families who moved off welfare and went to work in 600 different industries. Incomes on average more than doubled over a year.

The House proposal includes other good ideas, notably eliminating "broad-based categorical eligibility." This is a notorious loophole that declares someone eligible for food stamps because he received a brochure on heating assistance or a number for a hot line. The bill retains cross-eligibility that allow the truly needy to qualify for multiple programs without redundant asset tests.

The politics of all this are tough. The House Freedom Caucus will pan such changes as "welfare reform lite." The Senate won't want to take hard votes in an election year. Yet this isn't a budget slasher and merely reorients money and incentives. That will make it harder for Senators to pretend this "guts" the program, as some falsely said about Medicaid last year.

Democrats have attacked the plan with packaged lines that the GOP will kick millions off the rolls. The work rule doesn't bounce a single person. One irony is that the left says work requirements are misguided because most recipients already work. Then why fight a requirement?

Those who stop receiving benefits because of a work requirement will fall into two categories: They refused to work or train for work. Or they found a job and no longer need assistance, which is supposed to be a success story. The GOP's work requirements—explained accurately—poll well with the public because Americans think working is a fair trade for helping those who have fallen on tough times.

The program is supposed to be "supplemental," but progressives have transformed it into a permanent entitlement. The GOP's 1996 welfare reform was an historic success, and fixing food stamps is a chance to do it again.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT), who is another great leader within the Agriculture Committee.

The Congressman is a man I have been really pleased to serve with. He has been a Bible study buddy of mine. He represents Georgia's Eighth Congressional District and actually chairs the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for yielding. As we have talked a little bit, the question is: How do we help people get off of government programs? Not kick them off but give them a path off the programs.

I think one of the things that has not been talked about enough is the fact that the current system is a trap, and the harder people work and the more they make, sometimes the less they have.

So what we have done in our farm bill that is coming up is to change the assets that a household can have and remain on the SNAP program until they graduate off the SNAP program.

Under current law, households without an elderly or disabled member

could not have counted liquid assets above \$2,250. Households with an elderly or disabled member could not have liquid assets above \$3,250.

□ 1845

These dollar limits should have been annually indexed for overall inflation and then rounded down to the next \$250. But our bill raises the asset limits for an eligible household from \$2,250 to \$7,000. I want to say that again: \$2,250. That asset limit is raised to \$7,000 for an eligible household consisting of at least one elderly or disabled family member. It moves from \$3,250 to \$12,000. We want people who are out there doing the best they can to have the ability to work hard, save some money, and continue to improve their lives.

We also exclude in this legislation the first \$12,000 in the value of any licensed driver's vehicle in a SNAP household from the applicant's assets for purposes of eligibility determination. For many people on the SNAP program, they have to travel a long way to work or to get groceries, and we want them to be able to have that vehicle to get them there, especially in rural areas like the 24 counties that I represent. So excluding these vehicle assets is another benefit that we give to people in helping them have that avenue to graduate off of the SNAP program.

Our bill also permits SNAP applicants to maintain up to \$2,000 in a savings account. That is \$2,000 that will not count towards the \$7,000 asset threshold. So again, we are trying to help people who work hard, who do the best they can, be allowed to save some assets so that they are very comfortable when they graduate off of the SNAP program.

One other thing I would like to point out: Resources of a household member who receives SSI or PA benefits, those benefits are excluded as well. Under our current farm bill, SNAP recipients are caught between a rock and a hard place: You work hard, you save a little money, you invest in a vehicle, and you get kicked off the program.

Our farm bill actually fixes a lot of those things that people who want to graduate off of the SNAP program need fixed. So I am very pleased to be a supporter of this bill, and I think that this bill moves the law in a great direction to help those people who are out there actually working and doing the best they can graduate off of the SNAP program. And these asset threshold increases, along with the incentives to work, I think, move our legislation in a very good direction. And I am looking forward to having the vote on the floor and supporting this.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman for his leadership and for being a part of the Special Order.

I am now pleased to yield to a former chairman of the full Agriculture Committee and currently the Judiciary Committee chairman, who obviously

has a lot of experience in this area and with agriculture. And so it is my pleasure and privilege to yield to the gentleman from Virginia's Sixth Congressional District (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you, Chairman THOMPSON. I really appreciate your organizing this Special Order.

I am glad you picked this topic because we need to tell the story of what the great provisions are in this farm bill, but also how important it is to Republicans that we work with America's agricultural community to make sure that we continue to provide the safest, most abundant, most affordable food supply in the world.

Americans today, right now, enjoy one of the lowest percentages of their average income being spent on food of any country in the world, at any time in the world's history. Back when our country was founded, 90 percent of Americans lived on farms and basically produced enough food to just take care of themselves and then maybe have a little bit left over to sell to buy some implement for their family. Today, 2 percent of America's farmers do that, provide all of that food and nutrition, including what goes into these important programs for low-income people. So making sure these programs are protected but also making sure that they work fairly and honestly is the objective of this farm bill.

I want to talk tonight about a program that helps get food directly into the hands of those who are in need in communities throughout the country, including in Virginia's Sixth Congressional District that I have had the honor of representing. The Emergency Food Assistance Program, known as TEFAP, is a Federal program that helps to supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people, by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost.

TEFAP provides commodities to the States, who then distribute the food through local agencies, like the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and Feeding America Southwest Virginia in my district. This program is a good model of efficiency and allows State and local organizations to play a leading role in helping to meet the nutritional needs of those in their communities.

Food banks are an existing, strong network for food delivery to those in need. However, it is also important to note that many farmers often still have excess fruits and vegetables that go to waste. The solution is to establish a farm-to-food bank program, allowing States to enter into agreements with farmers to procure this excess for distribution.

To achieve this, we are expanding funding in H.R. 2 for TEFAP, using a portion of that increase for a farm-to-food bank program, a State-administered agriculture surplus clearance program, that provides an inexpensive source of food for low-income families while supporting producers.

I want to thank Chairman THOMPSON and Chairman CONAWAY for their hard

work to ensure that TEFAP remains a viable resource for American families.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your hard work and for organizing this opportunity to share some of the great things in this farm bill with the American people.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Chairman GOODLATTE, thank you for your leadership and your mentoring. Greatly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time remains.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman has 10 minutes remaining.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Excellent. I will take advantage of that opportunity. If we have some other Members who come in, I will yield to them.

The nutrition title for me, personally, is important. When I was just starting out in life, I had graduated from Penn State, I was working with people facing life-changing disease and disability, and married. We were pregnant with our first son, Parker, and so it was during that first pregnancy. And I was making, I think, maybe a whopping \$8,000 a year working full time.

There wasn't a time when we visited my parents or Penny's parents, my wife's parents, where we didn't come back with a bag of groceries. People do that. Families step in and they help. We did what we could, but we always came home with a bag of groceries.

We also found ourselves WIC eligible. The Women, Infants, and Children program is not under the farm bill. That is on the Committee on Education and the Workforce side.

But we know what it was like. It was difficult, actually. It was embarrassing to be able to use that voucher, but it was important that Penny and our unborn son at that point, now a 30-some-year-old dad with two boys of his own, got the nutrition that they needed. So I have been there, I have experienced that, and I know how important nutrition is.

Nutrition title, for me, I kind of relate it to, Mr. Speaker, what I would say is the worst part about living and growing up in a rural area, outside a small town, that everybody knew your business. I would be out playing with my brother and my sister, and if I did something wrong, when I got home, mom and dad already knew about it.

But the best part about living in that rural area, in rural America, is that everybody knows your business. I have a cousin, and about a month and a half ago their house burned to the ground. It was a terrible fire. They were lucky to get out. They just barely got out of the house. Yet, as the fire was just breaking through the roof of their home and the volunteer fire department was on the scene, they were surrounded by loved ones, friends, neighbors, and strangers who were there to offer their assistance, whether it was their love, their support, money, clothing, whatever, all kinds of things.

That is what the nutrition title is. Nutrition title is about helping neighbors in need, whether those neighbors

live in the most densely populated city or whether they live back on long country lanes. So that is why I'm so proud of the bipartisan work we have done up to this point, because there is nothing, again, in this nutrition title in this farm bill that wasn't a part of all those, over 21, hearings that we had.

Some of the things that are in there, in fact, are some of the priorities. I enjoy working across the aisle in a bipartisan way. I dedicate myself to that. So I was pleased to see my Democratic colleagues who communicated their four priorities into this bill to the committee.

Their first one was to incentivize nutrition education and healthy eating through a continuation of the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program, what we call FINI. I am pleased to report that the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018—that is what we are calling the farm bill—which includes the nutrition title, Title IV, maintains the FINI Program and enhances it with a technical assistance center allowing for best practices in operations and delivery to be housed and used for current and future grantees.

Additionally, the bill provides \$275 million for FINI over the life of the farm bill, actually establishes a baseline funding of \$65 million a year, allowing for expansion of opportunities to bring together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system to foster understanding of how they might improve nutrition and the health status of participating households and the people who live in those houses.

Their second priority, which I am pleased to report on, was—and I appreciated them putting this forward; it was important—to maintain our commitment to food banks with adequate funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program. You just heard the former Agriculture Committee chairman, Mr. GOODLATTE from Virginia, talk about TEFAP.

The farm bill increases TEFAP, funding for our food banks, by \$45 million. We have been funding it at \$15 million. It goes to \$60 million and directs \$20 million of that in a very innovative way, that funding, to establish a farm-to-food bank program in all States. It allows States to access agriculture surplus products directly from the farmers. The freshest of foods is the way I like to look at it. What a great enhancement, Mr. Speaker.

The third priority I am pleased to report on that is a part of this farm bill that they communicated was to promote the use of cutting-edge technology to ensure that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, retailers and recipients have secure, reliable, and efficient benefit processing. The farm bill introduces the concept of a national gateway, which is a system modernization that gives the USDA real-time oversight over the flow of transactions. It helps control costs.

It allows USDA to develop more tools to ensure integrity, assist in controlling access to individuals' payment information, and it sets the stage for the USDA to handle future developments in payment technology. With that increase in accountability, in those rare instances where fraud and abuse may occur, it allows for identification of that. And we incentivize States. States are now able, when they actually identify fraud, to keep a greater amount of that money that is recovered, although it has to be reinvested back into the nutrition title.

It is about to go for more program integrity, to make sure we are doing a better job of serving the needs of our neighbors who find themselves in those circumstances.

And finally, the last one was to continue to encourage States to collaborate with business and education leaders to provide innovative employment and training solution opportunities and programs. That is what we have been talking about this evening, largely. It is about the workforce solutions. This was put forward by my friends across the aisle that I am proud to serve with, the Democratic members of the Agriculture Committee. This was their goal.

We were able to do that. We have provided significant attention and considerable investment to improve SNAP workforce and education development services for recipients. I appreciate what they put forward as a part of this process, and I appreciate the fact that we have stepped up and we see this as a part of the text of this farm bill.

The updates to employment and training include best practices taken from beneficiary, industry, and State feedback. It includes interim education and training pilot reports. It partners with the workforce-to-innovation opportunity works that are already in place across our communities and our counties all across this great country. And it heightens emphasis on public-private partnerships and nutrition education and also allows recipients to continue to receive a supportive suite of services to address both food insecurity and upward mobility.

That is what we are trying to achieve. We want to make families food secure. We want to provide them access to the rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

□ 1900

Mr. Speaker, we have also done something for populations very near and dear to my heart as the dad of an Active Duty soldier, and that is, when individuals join the military later in life, they tend to enter with a spouse and a couple of kids, and it is hard to support a family on a private salary. Most privates are usually 18, 19 years old. They don't have that family support, and they do fine.

In fact, we just provided all of our military a 2.9 percent pay increase, the largest in over a decade. But for those

who are joining later in life, it is difficult. Their families live off base and they get a basic housing allowance to help pay for that, but in the past, basic housing allowance, 100 percent, with no contribution, no assistance, counted towards their eligibility for the SNAP program. They need that SNAP program to be able to make sure that their family gets support.

We have addressed that by providing moneys that would go toward an allowance, more or less, that would go towards to help them to truly to be able to receive those benefits and to be eligible for the SNAP program.

And so I am just so thankful for, really, the good bipartisan work that we have done up to this point, with all these hearings—over 100 hearings on the farm bill, as a whole; over 20 hearings for the nutrition title, title IV of this farm bill. We had over 80 witnesses. There is nothing in this farm bill that didn't come out there. There were some rumors of something about a Harvest Box, which was a terrible idea. That is not a part of the farm bill, never had any intentions of including that as a part of the farm bill.

I am appreciative to all the hard work that has gone into the bill, preparing this at this point, and I look forward to next week, next Wednesday. We will be marking this bill up in the Agriculture Committee. And I am pleased at the timing too. Normally, when we talk about reauthorizing the farm bill, we are 6 months, 12 months after it expired.

Quite frankly, we can't afford to do that. The farm income has been down for 4 years now, and this total farm bill is so important to providing for a robust rural America, and that is important to every American. Because without a robust rural America, people everywhere, including the cities, will wake up in the dark, in the cold, and hungry, because that is what the people of rural America, those farm families, provide for each and every one of us.

So, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to be joined by so many colleagues tonight on this topic, and I thank you for your attention.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

ADDRESSING FISCAL DEFICITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from California (Mr. KHANNA) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. KHANNA. Mr. Speaker, I am here on behalf of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and I want to just state our opposition to the balanced budget amendment.

It is worth reviewing the history on this topic. When President Bill Clinton left office, he left this country with surpluses. He had reversed the policy of Reagan economics, which had some of