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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 14, 1998, at 12:30 p.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, JULY 9, 1998

The Senate met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. THURMOND).

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by the guest Chaplain, Rev. James Lupton, retired, St. Albans Episcopal Church, Stuttgart, AR.

We are pleased to have you with us.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Rev. James Lupton, retired, St. Albans Episcopal Church, Stuttgart, AR, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray:

Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in whom we live and move and have our being, we ask Your blessing on this great country. From many races, creeds, and nations You called us into united purpose as a Nation of peoples with diverse talents, unique strengths, and boundless energy. You instilled in us a lust for liberty, justice, and peace. We are set in the midst of natural beauty and wealth beyond compare. Mighty oceans, majestic mountains, lakes and rivers, lush forests, sweeping prairies, fertile land, and the abundance of Your bounty sustain our lives. For Your gifts we give You hearty thanks and praise.

We ask Your special blessing today on these men and women elected to serve as our Senators. Look graciously upon them. Grant them knowledge, strength, courage, and wisdom as they reflect on and debate the vast and complex issues of our age. Bring forth from their talents and skills wise laws that we may be governed in peace, prosperity, and happiness. Keep Your bea-

con of divine love and eternal truth ever before them.

All these things we ask in Your holy Name, You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Glad to have you with us. A beautiful prayer.

REV. JAMES LUPTON, GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, this morning's prayer was offered by the Reverend James Lupton. Reverend Lupton retired in May 1997 after eight years at St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Stuttgart, AR.

During this ministry in Stuttgart, Reverend Lupton also served the people of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Tollville, AR. Prior to that, he served for four years in a Texas ministry.

Reverend Lupton received his call to the ministry later in life after a twenty-five year career as an architect. James comes from a long line of Arkansans. His mother's family was one of the first pioneer families to settle in Arkansas, coming to the state with Arkansas' first Governor, James Sevier Conway.

I am pleased that this individual with deep roots in my state was given the opportunity to offer today's prayer. We thank him for his inspiration.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, this morning the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10 o'clock. Following morning business, the Senate will proceed to a cloture vote on the substitute amendment to the product liability bill. Following that vote, a second vote will occur on adoption of the IRS conference report.

Following those two back-to-back votes, it will be the leader's intention to begin the Agriculture Export Relief Act or sanctions legislation. Hopefully, that bill will be considered under a brief time agreement of 2 hours.

Following that legislation, it is expected that the Senate will begin consideration of the higher education bill under the consent agreement of June 25, 1998. Therefore, several votes will occur during today's session of the Senate, with the first two votes occurring back to back at 10 a.m.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senators have until 10 a.m. in order to file second-degree amendments to the product liability substitute.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

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

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for not to exceed 1 hour. There will now be 30 minutes under the control of the Democratic leader.

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

A STEALTH DISASTER IN NORTH DAKOTA

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I have just returned after spending a week in my home State of North Dakota. On six previous occasions, I have come to the floor to describe to my colleagues what is happening there. I have described it as a stealth disaster. Last year, we faced a remarkable set of disasters, with the worst winter in our history, followed by the most powerful winter storm in 50 years, followed then by the 500-year flood, and, in the midst of all that, an outbreak of fire that destroyed much of downtown Grand Forks.

Those disasters received enormous attention. Daily, the national news media covered what was happening, so people all across America saw what was happening in North Dakota, and the people of the United States moved to respond. They responded with extraordinary generosity. We deeply appreciate what the people of this country did for North Dakota last year.

Mr. President, the disaster continues this year. Only this year, it is attended by almost no national news coverage and there is very little understanding of the depths of the crisis. This is a disaster nonetheless. This disaster is not as visible because it is a disaster occurring on the 30,000 farms of the State of North Dakota. From 1996 to 1997, according to the Government's own figures, farm income in North Dakota dropped 98 percent. That is not a misstatement, that is what the Government's own figures reveal, that farm income from 1996 to 1997 dropped 98 percent in the State of North Dakota. We led the Nation in farm income decline. And, by whatever measure one takes, this is a disaster.

It is a disaster caused by bad prices, bad weather, and bad policy. We have the lowest prices on record when adjusted for inflation. We have a continuation of the weather cycle that led to the incredible storms and flooding of last year. Now we are caught up in a wet weather cycle that has led to an

outbreak of disastrous disease—scab infects the crops of North Dakota. Last year, it cost about a third of the crop. But not only did it damage the crop, it also reduced the grade of the grain that we produce, so that farmers got a lower price. That, in the midst of the weakest prices, adjusted for inflation, that we have seen in the grain markets for 30 years.

The result is, farmers cannot cash-flow. The result is, farmers are being forced off the land. The result is, we have massive auction sales all across the State of North Dakota. The result is, farmers coming to me and bankers coming to me and Main Street business people coming to me saying, "Senator, there is something radically wrong, and something has to be done or we are going to lose a vast number of our farmers." Mr. President, we now start to see that prophecy unfold.

I brought with me upcoming auctions that appeared in the local newspaper. These auctions tell a story. These auctions are of farm after farm after farm being put up for sale because the farmers cannot cash-flow.

This starts on Monday, March 9, at 11 a.m. and runs right through March. Every day there is sale after sale after sale of farms in North Dakota. I just had farmers tell me that for the first time in 100 years, there is land that will not be farmed.

Some say, "Well, North Dakota is a marginal State. North Dakota has marginal weather to begin with." That is true in part of North Dakota, but this is happening in the richest part of North Dakota. This is happening in the Red River Valley of North Dakota. This is the richest farmland in the world. I grew up being told there had never been a crop failure in the Red River Valley. Never in history had there been a crop failure. For the last 5 years, farmers have not had a normal crop in the Red River Valley of North Dakota.

I just went through the southeastern corner of our State. What I saw in six counties was extraordinary. They are under water. They have 2 and 3 feet of water in the fields. They have had more rain in the first 6 months than they normally get in a year and a half. There is not going to be a normal crop in those six counties, and that is the southeastern part of the State. It has been the northeastern part that has been so hard hit in the last year.

This weather pattern seems to be expanding, taking in more and more land, more and more farms inundated, more and more farmers who aren't going to have a crop or going to have a badly diminished crop and, on top of that, are going to have very weak prices. The result will be even more auctions.

Already we anticipate losing one in every 10 of our farmers this year. Experts that we met with when the Secretary of Agriculture came to North Dakota 3 weeks ago told us next year we might anticipate losing one of every three farmers. This is a disaster of

enormous scope, Mr. President, and I hope I can convince my colleagues that it is critically important that we respond.

This chart shows 141 farm auctions scheduled between the beginning of March and the end of June. That is nearly two auctions every day for 4 months.

Who are these farmers who are advertising auctions? I am very sorry to report to my colleagues that these are not farmers of retirement age. Many of these farmers are young farmers who simply can't take the debt load; they simply can't take being in a circumstance of bad weather, bad prices and bad policy. The result is they are leaving farming.

One has to ask, Who is going to farm this land in the future? Who is going to provide the food stocks for the American people, because if there is ever a breadbasket State, it is North Dakota. We are No. 1 in the production of crop after crop after crop. We are No. 1 in durum that goes to produce pasta. Over 65 percent of the durum wheat produced in the United States is produced in North Dakota; No. 1 in barley; No. 1 in sunflower; No. 1 in canola; No. 1 in many of the other wheat categories. North Dakota literally is a breadbasket State, and North Dakota is in disaster. There is no other way to describe it. The result is going to be a calamity unless there is a response.

We see these auctions. This is a typical one: April 14, 1998. This fellow is going to have an auction. It says:

Darryl has rented out the farm and, therefore, will liquidate the following large line of top quality equipment by public auction.

If you look at what is being auctioned, it is very revealing: A 1995 row crop drill; 1996 row lifter; 1996 cultivator; 1997 field sprayer.

What does that tell us? Farmers thinking they are going out of business are not buying new equipment in 1997. They are not buying new equipment in 1998. They have been hit by a calamity, a calamity that is forcing them off the land and out of business. No one who is planning to quit in 1998 buys a sprayer in 1997.

Another auction advertisement states that two farmers have discontinued their farming operations. Again, we see new equipment being sold. Again, we find that this is, as described in the ad, single-owner equipment, and yet they have equipment purchased as recently as 1997.

These are not small investments. Many of these pieces of equipment cost \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000, and they just bought them last year and they are going out of business this year. Not one, not two, but hundreds and hundreds and thousands, and it is because there is a collapse of farm income. There is a collapse of production, and we don't have a safety net in place.

It is very interesting if you compare what we are doing in this country to what our chief competitors are doing.