This resolution endorses the use of force, but it states no objective for the use of force. We create trouble for ourselves when we are imprecise about policy and about the use of force and when we fail to articulate what we believe policy should be based on specific facts and specific objectives.

It would be better, I think, for the Congress to call on the President here to consult with Congress prior to using force. We would know at that time, and we do not know now, what circumstances require use of U.S. military forces in the Gulf. We would fulfill our role as a coequal branch of government if we leave authorization for such time. I understand this is not an authorization bill.

I am uncomfortable voting for this resolution, principally because I think it does not measure up to the way a responsible Congress should engage in foreign policy making. I am even less comfortable, however, voting against it.

I do not want to go on record against the use of force, first, because I think we are going to come up to this point again with Iraq in the months ahead; second, because of the egregious violations of the U.N. Security Council resolutions by Iraq and its pattern of avoidance and duplicity; and, third, because a vote against the resolution suggests that we are not prepared to use force against Iraq, and I think that would be unwise. Therefore, I will support the resolution with the reservations I have suggested.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time and, in closing, I just want to remind our colleagues to let us concentrate on the fact that the government of Iraq's actions are unacceptable and a material breach of their obligations and, accordingly, this measure before us with regard to Iraq's continuing programs of building up weapons of mass destruction threaten our own vital interests and we should be supporting the measure.

I urge a supporting vote for S.J. Res. 54.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate joint resolution, Senate Joint Resolution 54.

The question was taken.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that, I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EMERGENCY FARM FINANCIAL RELIEF ACT

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2344) to amend the Agricultural Market Transition Act to provide for the advance payment, in full, of the fiscal year 1999 payments otherwise required under production flexibility contracts.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2344

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act''.

SEC. 2. SPECIAL RULE FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999 PAYMENT UNDER PRODUCTION FLEXIBILITY CONTRACTS.

Section 112(d) of the Agricultural Market Transition Act (7 U.S.C. 7212(d)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

''(3) SPECIAL RULE FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999.—Notwithstanding the requirements for making an annual contract payment specified in paragraphs (1) and (2), at the option of the owner or producer, the Secretary shall pay the full amount (or such portion as the owner or producer may specify) of the contract payment required to be paid for fiscal year 1999 at such time or times during that fiscal year as the owner or producer may specify.''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, we have problems in farm country. Prices have declined for farmers and ranchers. Many producers are wrestling with multiyear crop losses and others are suffering as a result of this year's severe adverse weather. Feed is expensive, livestock prices are down and, in some parts of the country, forage is virtually nonexistent. For this reason, I rise today in support of Senate 2344, the Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act. This legislation was originally introduced in the House, cosponsored by 50 farm state members.

Senate 2344 will allow farmers the option of receiving all of the Agricultural Market Transition Act payments for the year 1999 immediately after the beginning of the fiscal year. Annual payments are now made twice a year, in December or January, and again in September. This means a farmer may elect to receive all his 1998 and 1999 payments in October this year.

□ 1530

The bill would make $5.5 billion available to farmers as much as 1 year early to help them cope with the cash shortage that they now are experiencing due to low prices. It will have the effect of the huge interest-free cash loan to producers for up to 1 year.

For example, the 1,000-acre wheat farm with a 30-bushel AMTA payment would have the option of getting the entire $19,000 payment in October 1999 rather than waiting 3 months to get half the payment of $9,500 and the full payment 12 months from now of the remaining $9,500.

The proposal leaves the option of early payments with the farmer, who can then make the decision on the basis of personal circumstances. If it helps, the farmer will ask for the advance payment. If it only creates tax or the other difficulties, the farmer will not choose to exercise the option.

Because all of the 1999 AMTA payments occur within the same fiscal year, there is no CBO-scored cost to this proposal. Congress has the opportunity to address the current cash shortage on the farm without incurring any budget cost and give the U.S. farmers the opportunity to solve cash shortage problems immediately.

We have taken previous action that responds to the current situation and we will continue to act. We have passed a sound agricultural research bill. We have found $500 million to save crop insurance. We reversed the Administration's decision to stop food exports to India and to Pakistan, and we took action on normal trading relations with China. Beyond that, we will act on IMF funding and Fast Track authority in the near future.

We are developing new ideas and exploring recent proposals to address the crisis in our agricultural community. No one believes that the action we are taking here today is the complete answer to the difficulties that our farmers are facing. But it is a sound step that we can take today that will reassure producers and their bankers that the farmer's entire assets can be available to address the current situation.

Secretary Glickman told our committee last week that the Department of Agriculture will complete a total assessment of crop loss and the extent of the disaster by August 12 this year. With that in hand, Members' personal assessments during the work periods, along with the committee, will work in September to formulate an additional action that the House might need to take.

In addition, we will be calling upon the Secretary to use his full range of authorities already in his discretion to provide relief to suffering farmers.

This is a very, very important tool, Mr. Speaker, for farmers to relieve short-term cash-flow problems. We need to act swiftly to allow farmers the advance knowledge of the possibility of using these AMTA payments early on this year.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon in support of Senate 2344, the Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act, although I do so with reservations.

Many farmers and ranchers today are faced with disastrous conditions. In my

area, one is more apt to see a bald eagle than to meet a beginning or new farmer. In some cases, these economic hardships are caused by low prices. In others, severe climatic conditions are causing major crop failures.

In my own State of Minnesota, farmers are facing falling wheat, corn, and soybean prices, with plantings of those crops the highest levels that they have seen since the 1980's, particularly the feed grains.

In the Red River Valley areas of North Dakota and Minnesota, the price loss is compounded by a multiple year loss of wheat and barley due to a disastrous disease known as scab.

Texas is currently facing one of the worst droughts in decades. Some areas have experienced more than 125 days without significant rainfall in combination with record-setting temperatures. This severe drought has also spread to other States, including Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, New Mexico and Oklahoma, with additional States being affected daily.

Today, with the passage of S. 2344, we are trying to address in a very modest way some of the economic hardships our farmers are experiencing. Under current law, producers who enter into an Agricultural Market Transition Act contract, or an AMTA contract, can elect to receive payment once or twice a year. Farmers can advance half of that total payment either to December 15 or January 15 and then receive the balance in September.

This bill would change the current timing and allow farmers the choice of receiving either one full payment at any time during the fiscal year, which starts October 1, 1998, or two payments of 50 percent at any time during the fiscal year at the producer's option.

Let me explain the precise benefit this legislation would provide in terms of an example. If a producer who receives a maximum allowable AMTA payment, which is $40,000, chooses to take his payment immediately, he would receive 3 months' additional interest on 50 percent of his payment and 12 months of additional interest on the other 50 percent of his payment. That is all of the clear calculable financial benefit, nothing more. If you put pencil to paper, with 8 percent interest, this comes out to roughly $2,000.

The legislation does not give producers $5½ billion in disaster assistance. That is not the case. These are payments that the producers are already entitled to. This payment merely allows producers to receive either 3 or 12 months earlier the money they were already expecting.

This legislation provides no assistance to producers facing hardship because of low prices. This needs to be addressed by increasing export demand or by reexamining the proposals to remove the caps on marketing loans.

Passing legislation as soon as possible to fund the International Monetary Fund will help raise the prices for our producers in the near future.

It is also important to note that this does not help producers if the payments are going to landowners as opposed to the producer himself. Advancing AMTA payments raises a question of why we are attempting to alleviate such severe conditions with a proposal which some have characterized as putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.

I support this legislation because it is a modest first step in the recognition of the major problems that are facing American farmers. This legislation does not in any way address fully the severity of those problems. It is more like offering chicken soup. If you are sick, it cannot hurt. It may make you feel better.

Senate 2344 will not solve the problems facing producers all across the country. We are going to have to provide real relief to our producers within the confines of the budget as soon as possible. I look forward for ways to work on a bipartisan basis to do this.

In the meantime, we are working today to seek to do whatever we can with respect to the AMTA payments that may provide some financial relief to producers.

Mr. Chairman, I have two matters I would like to raise in a colloquy. First, I understand that last week the Secretary of Agriculture voiced concerns about the Department's ability to implement S. 2344 as drafted. Because of technical limitations, the Department plans to offer producers the choice of receiving either one full payment at any time during the fiscal year or two payments of 50 percent at any time during the fiscal year at the producer's option.

Would my colleague agree that the Department would be in compliance with Congress' intent by offering these options?

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MINGE. I yield to the gentleman from Oregon.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Yes. Because producers would be able to get all their 1999 payments as early as October 1998, this form of implementation would provide the necessary financial assistance and flexibility, I believe, to producers. Recognizing the Department's inability to provide a greater range of options, implementation of Senate 2344 in the manner stated I believe would comply with intent of this legislation.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, also I understand that this election to receive payments early is not intended by this body to change or create any tax liability with respect to payments that are not received in 1998 but are instead received in 1999.

Is this the understanding of my colleague?

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. If the gentleman would further yield, yes, it is. I believe this should not be intended to change any tax situation with respect to this legislation.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to add in closing that speaking on behalf of many on the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, there is concern that the Farm Service Agency have adequate staff resources to effectively and efficiently comply with the legislation that we are currently considering. There certainly is continuing concern about the adequacy of staffing at the Farm Service Agency, and we urge the appropriators, as they consider the agricultural appropriations bill in conference committee, to take into consideration the legislation that we are acting on today.

Mr. Speaker, I include the following for the RECORD:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET,

Washington, DC, August 3, 1998.

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

(This statement has been coordinated by OMB with the concerned agencies.)

S. 2344—Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act

(Sen. COVERDELL (R) and 14 cosponsors.)

The Administration supports House passage of S. 2344 in order to accelerate the 1999 Agricultural Market Transition Act payments to producers.

The Administration regrets that the Senate did not include the provision of the Senate-passed FY 1999 Agricultural/Rural Development appropriations bill that would provide $500 million for new emergency funding for farmers and ranchers who face financial stress as a result of natural disasters and low prices. Nor does the House make in order such an amendment. The Administration urges the Congress to enact this provision as soon as possible. In the interim, the Department of Agriculture is continuing to assess the actual emergency needs of farmers and ranchers and will report to Congress in the near future.

PAY-AS-YOU-GO

S. 2344 would affect direct spending; therefore, it is subject to pay-as-you-go requirements of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. OMB's preliminary scoring estimate is that the net budget cost of this bill is zero.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), a capable member of our committee.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, as has been stated, the current conditions and crisis in agriculture is very broad and very wide and very deep. No single action that we can take or that anyone can take alone is going to solve this problem. In fact, many single actions that we take will not even address concerns of some farmers or ranchers.

Tomorrow, it will be one month that the temperatures in Texas have been in excess of 100 degrees and most of that has been without any rain. In fact, I have some counties in my district that have had less than an inch and a quarter of rain since January 1.

Even in those areas in which crops are irrigated, it is virtually impossible to keep up with the needs of a crop due to the fact of the high temperatures, the drought and the excessive winds. When that even is possible, the irrigation expenses this year are going to be phenomenal.

Pastures are burned up, not all of them from the drought; some of them literally have burned up. Cattle prices are down. Ranchers are having to take their cattle prematurely to the market at a down market time, and this further complicates the problem.

I once again call on the Secretary to allow a 5 percent a month penalty on the annual payments that would be made through CRP to allow the grazing of CRP lands. It might mean that some people can keep from having to send those cattle to the market, hopefully being able to preserve them until winter wheat pasture is available.

There is a lot more that needs to be done. The Secretary, in fact, told our committee last week that it will be sometime later in August even before the Department has the loss figures. So it makes it very difficult for the Congress to act on anything further at this particular time when even the loss figures are not known.

This is a tool. This is something that is going to provide some benefits to farmers if they wish to take advantage of it. It provides $551 billion October 1, across this country. That would be an infusion into the cash flow of the farmer if in fact they need to take it at this time and prevent them from having to take a loan. In Texas alone this would amount to over $536 million that would be available at a much earlier date.

While again I recognize that there are other things that need to be done, this is, in fact, only one of the arrows in a quiver that we hope we can combat this crisis with. To those who would argue against this, for the fact that it does not go far enough, I would simply say that that is recognized. No one has contended that it does go far enough, but it is another of the steps that we think can provide some assistance at a much needed time to farmers who are facing a crisis.

□1545

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to the floor today to speak on behalf of S. 2344, the companion bill to the gentleman from Oregon's H.R. 4265, an effort to reach out and address some of the needs that we see in rural America in production agriculture.

In my very own western Oklahoma between the drought and the bugs and the supply problems, or should I say demand problems that have been brought on by the side effects of what some up here call the Asian flu, the Asian financial flu, I should say, we have some real problems that need to be addressed out in production agriculture. One of the efforts that I think provides a short-term band-aid that puts us in a position in a number of areas to be able to put another crop in the ground this fall is S. 2344. It makes available on or about the first day of October when you consider the option, the option, to take the entire 1999 market transition payment if a farmer who signed up under the 1996 farm bill chooses to do so, you take that money along with the funds that will come in the second half of the 1998 payment, it makes literally $8.3 billion cash available out in farm country for those farmers and ranchers to put into a crop. It does it in a way that my budgeteer friends sitting in the gallery right now who I have worked with, who are very dedicated to maintaining the financial integrity of this country, it does it in a way that does not impact the budget, because as the folks who have spoken before me pointed out clearly, it accelerates to the first day of fiscal year 1999 that farmer's option to take that money.

Bear in mind, Mr. Speaker, this is not a cure-all in itself but this provides us with a window of opportunity. It gives our farmers and ranchers a chance until we can do the things that are necessary to make agriculture as healthy as it could be and should be, things like using every cent in the export enhancement program fund. In the last 3 years, we have had about $1.5 billion that has not been spent. Perhaps that should have been used and should be used and could be used to defend our market share or grow our market share around the world.

I am a strong supporter of the CRP program, the conservation reserve program. We have got about 5 million authorized acres out there that are not being used, another 5 million come out in just a matter of weeks, 10 million acres that could be channeled in States like the Minnesotas and the Dakotas and the Texases and the Oklahomas where we do not need to use that soil right now, and because of mother nature, we are going to start losing it into the air and have been losing it into the air. Let us fully utilize CRP. And, yes, the ultimate thing that we have to do as a body in this Congress, and, that is, work to open those markets. We have been grain exporters in this country since the very founding of this Nation. We literally are the breadbasket for the world. But the world has to have access to our commodities and we have to make sure they have an opportunity to purchase those.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. WATKINS).

(Mr. WATKINS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WATKINS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to my colleagues and also to the American people today from the heart, to have an emotional concern, not a political concern.

There is an emergency on the family farm in America. Forty years ago I served as State FFA president, the Future Farmers of America, in Oklahoma. I stated at that time there are 16 percent of us in the production of agriculture. Four years later when I was selected the outstanding agriculture student at OSU, I talked about the fact that there were only 12.5 percent of us in the production of agriculture. Today as I stand on this floor of the United States Congress, I have to say there are only 1.2 percent of us in the production of agriculture. And, Mr. Speaker, I saw figures just less than two months ago where we are probably going to lose 25 percent more of our farmers and our cattle people this year if something doesn't happen to assist them through this crisis.

Why? Because we have seen markets close down. We see droughts. The gentleman from Oklahoma referred to Asia. Mr. Speaker, Asia normally buys 45 percent of our agriculture exports. But they have had a downturn in their economy and they cannot buy.

Second, the European Union is using 75 percent of their budget to subsidize the agriculture in Europe, to subsidize the internal production but also grabbing export markets around the world.

Third, because we see sanctions in countries that should be buying our agriculture products. Our country places those sanctions and we cannot sell the food and the beef and other products from the American family farms.

And, four, we have now in 1998, as my friend from Texas said, the worst drought in history, since the Dust Bowl in 1934. The land is parched. The grass is burned up. Cattle are having to go to market because we have no water and no feed and no grass.

What is the solution? This is not the total answer, but this is one step that we can move on today. That is, expediting the market transition, by budgeting $8 billion that is already in the budget, so that they can pay bills. Many of them are going to have working capital to have to survive and pay bills.

Second, we have to utilize an emergency feed and hay program if we are going to keep many of the cattle and not just flood the markets. Let me say in the drought of 1956, which I barely survived, I sold cows for 10 cents a pound. I know the hurt and I know the pain that is out there on the farm and what the cattle people are going through. We have got to correct it. We have got to take the actions my colleague from Oklahoma said on the enhancement export funds. We have got to use those funds.

Put off the long-term solution is international exports. We must pass fast track. It should be a bipartisan solution, not one that is partisan. We also must add the IMF funding in order to help Asia to purchase American agriculture products. We have got to also look at the sanctions, if medicine is a human need, food is also. We must do allow food to be exempt from sanctions.

We can solve the problem. The question we have to ask ourselves is do we have the will to solve the problem. Let me tell my colleagues what they said

to me in Europe. When I asked them about all their subsidies, they basically stated, ''We'll pay whatever the price to maintain the family farm in Europe.'' They are using 75 percent of their budget to do it.

What will do we have? Do we have the will that we want to keep a domestic food basket available for the American people? If we are concerned about the national security of this country, we had better maintain that food supply and the family farmer.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Montana (Mr. HILL).

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for yielding me this time and I want to congratulate him for his efforts to bring this matter before the House and put it on the desk of the President before we begin the August work period. I am proud to have been a cosponsor of the House version of this measure.

Mr. Speaker, Montana producers will have available in October under this plan $105 million which is about twice of what they would have had available without this measure. This is going to provide important cash flow for them this fall. It will allow them to cope with what are broken down markets that have reduced prices to some of the lowest prices in modern times. It will also help Montana producers deal with adverse weather conditions which has also provided for low production.

I believe we need to do more. I am hopeful that we can work to try to increase the AMTA payments in the future. Perhaps we can make some revisions in the crop insurance program to help folks, particularly in the Northern Plains. We need to investigate the Canadian Wheat Board. We need to eliminate trade sanctions that involve food, that are eliminating markets.

Mr. Speaker, we are not just losing markets to American commodities. The important thing is that we are losing market share. The problem with losing market share is that that threatens low prices for our commodities over the long term, not just over the short term. I am hoping that Congress can work from this measure forward together so that we can secure additional markets, so we can fight and defend our market share.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BONILLA).

Mr. BONILLA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. This is a very important piece of legislation. I rise in strong support today.

I just returned from Texas a little over an hour ago, Mr. Speaker, where we have had in south Texas the 34th day of triple-digit temperatures which has broken another record. Farmers and ranchers all over Texas and throughout the Southwest are being hit hard by this drought which is part of a one-two punch, the other being the falling commodity prices. There is no area harder hit right now than south Texas, although they are feeling it all across the State.

This bill in the simplest of terms for those who are not in agriculture would be like when you were younger or you were struggling at some point in your life and you needed a little advance money on your paycheck and you asked the boss or the appropriate authorities, can I just have a little advance and I think it will get me through this tough time. It is not going to solve anyone's financial problems long-term nor is it going to make it rain, but it is going to provide that necessary capital to get through a very difficult time this fall.

The situation is very critical in Texas now. There are burned-up fields, no grass for livestock to graze on, aflatoxin has hit the corn crop very hard. We all understand that the only long-term solution to this is to have more rain. This is the most powerful city on earth, Mr. Speaker, but there is not a person in this city who can make it rain. We must, as we all know, appeal to a higher authority for that long term.

All of Texas has experienced less than 25 percent of normal rainfall for April through June and temperatures topped out above the century mark nearly the entire month of July across the State. Until the rain comes, these early payments are a first step in helping farmers get through this difficult time. I have committed to my colleagues on the Committee on Agriculture and the agriculture appropriations subcommittee to continue to work on this issue and develop a plan to provide assistance to our farmers and ranchers. As Americans we enjoy the world's cheapest, safest and most abundant food supply. I hope every farmer out there understands that there is not a day that goes by that Members on both sides of the aisle, both Democrats and Republicans, are thinking about our constituents out there and desperately trying to come up with more solutions to help them get through this very difficult time.

I certainly appreciate all the members of the Committee on Agriculture, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) our chairman and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) the ranking member and all the committee members who are working side by side to help in this very, very critical situation.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BARRETT).

Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time, and I congratulate him for the manner in which he has brought this legislation to our attention so dramatically and so quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I do rise, of course, today in support of the bill. Even amid a booming economy nationally, there is a lot of concern out there in the Northern Plains and, of course, elsewhere where grain prices have soured, ag prices are down, and cattle prices are down. Regretfully, the continued rise of the stock market, which has benefited a lot of people, does not have a direct positive effect on our Nation's agricultural producers.

This is a bad year, especially for grain prices, although it was unrealistic to assume that the high commodity prices of the 1996 and 1997 marketing years would last forever, even under the best of conditions. As has been mentioned earlier, a large part of the decline in prices is due to the financial crisis that Asia is experiencing. The recovery of those economies will have a tremendous impact, of course, on U.S. agriculture.

I think another reason for depressed prices is the Administration's lack of a focused export policy. Many national agriculture organizations have expressed concern in regard to our trade policies.

I think Congress has been doing its part to help our beleaguered producers as evidenced by this bill. We passed antisanction legislation that would allow USDA to guarantee U.S. wheat sales to Pakistan and India. This legislation that we are considering today will ensure many producers will have much needed capital to continue their farming operations for another year. The farming business is a year-to-year enterprise and it would be unfair to deny strapped producers the capital necessary for next year's operation.

I have been a consistent supporter of the new farm bill, and I remain so today. Regretfully, I think, Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of needless, false and harmful rhetoric from both houses of Congress about this legislation. Farm bills do not set market prices. The Administration, I think, needs to take some responsibility in this regard. We need a clear and consistent trade policy to bolster our U.S. ag exports. With one out of three acres that we plant in this year going to export, fast track negotiating authority is absolutely necessary.

I remain steadfast in my support. I strongly encourage my colleagues to support S. 2344. It will help our deserving producers.

□ 1600

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Certainly this afternoon is an opportunity for bipartisan support of a measure that we all recognize is providing at least some relief. There certainly is room for debate about some aspects of trade policy. I am not sure that it would be productive this afternoon to try to fully ventilate that. Suffice it to say that folks in this body and on the Committee on Agriculture fully recognize the importance of immediate full funding for the International Monetary Fund that is not moving ahead. I notice it is not on the calendar for this week before we go home for recess. It is hard to understand why if that has been approved in

the Senate and is being requested by the administration it cannot be completed by the House.

So I would hope that we in the Committee on Agriculture could get fully behind that and at least do some things that we see that we agree with the Senate on and do them promptly.

Mr. Speaker, for purposes of control, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER).

(Mr. BEREUTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Oregon for yielding the time and the gentleman from Minnesota for yielding to him.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 2344, the Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act. This important legislation would provide farmers the option, of course, of receiving all of their Agriculture Market Transition Act contract payments for fiscal year 1999 immediately after the beginning of the fiscal year. Currently it is an option at least. Currently producers receive two separate payments, one in December or January and one in September. This change would provide farmers with much needed infusion of cash at a time when they clearly need it. Since the payment would occur in the same fiscal year, there is no additional cost to the Federal government.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to be a cosponsor of the original House legislation, and I commend the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture for his initiative.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the agricultural sector is hurting. While this legislation is certainly helpful, it is also important to continue efforts to improve agricultural trade since about 40 percent of U.S. farm production is exported. Several of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have already mentioned that.

One of the root causes of the current low commodity price is the current drop in exports, especially to Asia, as a result of the region's economic downturn and the relative value of the U.S. dollar versus the currencies of our export competitors. My State, for example, over 85 percent of all of our exports total go to Asia. To combat the drop in exports it is crucial that efforts continue to approve fast track trade authority, increase pressure on the European Union to reduce subsidies and anti-competitive trade practices and to approve legislation designed to block unilateral sanctions which we too often impose in this body and in the other body which do harm agriculture. Such actions are clearly long-term approaches to improving the economic outlook for the Nation's producers, however S. 2344 will provide immediate help for farmers, and, Mr. Speaker, therefore I urge my colleagues to support it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The Chair advises that the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) has no time remaining, although the gentleman from Oregon has the right to close. The gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) has 8½ minutes remaining.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) for the time, and, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize a point that the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) made, and he is well known as an international trade expert, and to reinforce the statement that the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) made, and that is simply that he has heard all of us emphasize the importance for this country to pay its full share of the International Monetary Fund, and I will continue to work towards that, that goal, and he knows that that will be before this Congress before we adjourn this session of the Congress.

In addition to that and equally as important, as the gentleman knows, we must pass what we call fast track legislation to give this President of the United States the opportunity to enter into agreements with other nations at a time when it is most important to us, at a time when we are going to review the whole Uruguay Round of the WTO, of the World Trading Organization, and we are going do that in 1999. Going into those negotiations without fast track would severely injure this Nation's opportunity to trade, to discuss, to enter into agreements which would open borders for us and give us the opportunity to entertain agreements with other countries.

Mr. WATKINS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. I yield to the gentleman from Oklahoma.

Mr. WATKINS. First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) for his leadership and his foresight on the committee and my colleague from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) in moving this a step forward. I think we all know that the drought is an additional thing that is coming in right on top of low prices and that we have got to have help for our cattlemen in getting emergency feed assistance, emergency hay assistance, especially in the Southwest, and I know my colleagues helped provide that leadership in helping us move forward in the agriculture appropriations committees, and I think the Senate under Senator CONRAD is adding $500 million, and we are probably going to need more to assist the drought stricken cattle country of the Southwest.

Will the gentleman be helping us in that area of feed and hay assistance?

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, as the gentleman knows, we have entertained all of the issues, including the problems in Minnesota and North Dakota and South Dakota which are in crisis. Beyond that there are disasters all over the country, in Oklahoma and Texas. We are going to be looking at all those if we can identify finally with the Secretary's assistance, and we are going, within reason we are going to try to help everyone.

Mr. WATKINS. I was in Bennington, OK, my boyhood home area July 4, and they are feeding cattle cubes and hay. That is at least a month to six weeks earlier than when we ever fed before, and that is eating up the financial equity. Equity they do not have.

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I understand the gentleman. I have been in the cattle business for 35 years and broke twice, so I understand.

Mr. WATKINS. I thank the gentleman from Oregon for his leadership.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to commend the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture for moving this program forward. As my colleagues know, it sounds like a novel when we say times are tough in ag country, and it really is. It is certainly not fiction.

Times are particularly difficult in ag country in Georgia this year. We are coming off one of the worst disasters in 1997 we have ever seen. 1998 has not been any better. This will significantly help our farmers and ranchers, and we appreciate the House Committee on Agriculture chairman championing this proposal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) has expired.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I understand the gentleman from Oregon has two other speakers, and I will yield to them as well, but I have a speaker who has arrived that I would like to reserve some time for as well.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LATHAM).

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota first of all, and I rise in support of S. 2344.

I have heard a lot from home about the problems we have in farm country, the disasters we have. I just want to say that I think this will help a great deal to get us through an immediate crisis, but if we have a disaster, I want to state that the administration's policy has been, number one, to cut crop insurance when we have these disasters. Last year we had to fight to the mat to be able to save crop insurance. In the past 3 years they have had a billion and a half dollars available for market export programs. They finally used about $7 million of that. Today, as far as trade sanctions, the administration has put on 61 sanctions in the last 6 years compared in the last 80 years we had 120 sanctions. Forty percent of the world's population is under sanctions from this administration today which cuts off any possibility of selling agricultural products.

Lastly, we have got to pass this fall fast track legislation to help agriculture, and I would hope the administration would finally get on board and decide to push it. I have been reading all the articles now saying they are going to sit on the sidelines, encourage the Democrats to sit on the sidelines. We have got to have negotiation authority so that we can move our agricultural products. Long term that is the solution for agriculture, is to sell the production we can have in this miracle in the U.S. called agriculture.

Again I want to support this bill, I encourage everyone to do that, but we have got to change our policies if we are in effect going to save agriculture in the long term.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Minnesota has 3½ minutes remaining.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON).

Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support this bill and commend the chairman and the ranking member and others for bringing this forward. But I want to bring a little bit different perspective to the situation.

I fully understand that those areas of the country where they are now experiencing a disaster, whether it be drought or other things, this will be a big help because it will move up the cash flow situation and put them in a little better shape. However, in our part of the world, in northwestern Minnesota and North Dakota, we have had a disaster for 4 or 5 or 6 years, depending on the individual farmers, where this disease problem that we had, primarily scab, has caused us to lose crops 4 or 5 or 6 years in a row, and I am not so sure for those people that are in that situation whether this is going to make a whole lot of a difference to them just because of the situation that they are in.

So I am here today supporting this. This will help people that have gotten into this situation recently. It will help farmers that are experiencing the problem with low commodity prices and the resultant cash flow problems. But we need in our part of the world, and the chairman knows this, we need in addition some help with making crop insurance, making it whole for that period of time where it was not covering people, trying to get the CRP program changed so that those people that have experienced these losses for 4 or 5 years can potentially get that land into CRP.

One of the things that people need to understand, we have got this scab disease that lives in the soil and in the residue. One of the reasons we have got this problem, in my opinion, is because we have given up mould board plowing and we have been using no-tail which allows this stuff to live even longer and better, and if we could put this land into CRP, get it out of production, get it out of wheat production for a while, we might be able to do some good in this area.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for 1½ minutes.

Mr. MINGE. Mr. Speaker, we have had a fair amount of talk here in the last few minutes about the administration and trade, and I would just like to set the record straight.

There is no administration that I am aware of in recent history that has been as strong an advocate of trade, liberalization of trade policies, as the Clinton administration, and I think that all of us really ought to respect the record that they have established and not try to drag it down.

I have sat on the floor in this body on several occasions when my colleagues have considered trade sanctions or restrictions on trade, if this happens or that happens, and we tend to vote with almost a herd mentality. Well, the administration is asking for us to show restraint.

The administration has been a very vocal supporter of IMF, and I think all of us have acknowledged that. We all know the administration has been a very strong supporter of fast track. The administration has indicated it would like to have the fast track vote after the first of the year.

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It feels like it is going to be a highly politicized vote, and if we are going to promote international trade, this is not the context in which to do it and this authority is not needed before the end of the year. The Secretary of Agriculture told us this at a hearing last Thursday.

So even though the majority controls the floor and we will vote on what the majority brings up, it is tragic if we turn the Fast Track debate into simply a pre-election game. I would urge that we work on a bipartisan basis on this trade issue, just like we have worked on this matter that is under consideration this afternoon.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. Speaker, television can take us many places, but it can't make us experience the pain and hardship people feel when they're going through difficult times.

Night after night for the past several weeks, the network news shows have been filled with images from my home state of Texas and stories of how people are dealing with the drought. By now, the stories are familiar.

Ground too dry for seed to take root in. Farmers having to plow under their crops. The livelihood of towns and communities literally blowing away in the wind. The drought is putting a real squeeze on farmers and ranchers trying to make a living. Economically, it's figuring to be even worse than the drought Texas went through in 1996.

The bill we're voting on today will clearly not solve all of the problems people are facing because of these severe weather conditions. But it is a start, and it will put money in people's pockets quicker than any other plan being discussed in Washington. Perhaps just as important, it's a sign that we're finally getting through in convincing people that something needs to be done to help farmers in our area deal with the drought.

Over the past few weeks, some people have been trying to play politics with this crisis. That is wrong. Congress and the Administration need to work together to do what's right for farmers. The government can't make it rain. But it can help farmers cope with a major national disaster. This plan is the first step in doing that, and will likely be the first of other agriculture-related proposals coming out of Congress in the coming weeks.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join you and Chairman SMITH in support of S. 2344 and ask for its unanimous consideration by the House. As a cosponsor of its House companions S. 2344 would allow farmers the option of receiving all the Agriculture Market Transition Act (AMTA) contract payments for fiscal year 1999 immediately after the beginning of the fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, the bill would make $5.5 billion available as much as one year early to help farmers cope with the cash shortage they are now experiencing due to low prices. For the State of Illinois, the changes will mean an extra $500 million into the hands of farmers who choose the advance payment schedule.

The bill also increases the flexibility we gave farmers with the 1996 farm bill. It will let them, not the government, decide if receiving payments early is the best thing for their farms.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, because the AMTA payments occur in the same fiscal year, there is no Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scored cost to this proposal. Congress has the opportunity to address the current cash shortage on the farm without incurring any budget cost and give U.S. farmers the opportunity to solve cash shortage problems immediately.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, S. 2344 does not lessen the urgency for Congress and the Administration to use important trade tools. The Administration promised farmers that it would use the Export Enhancement Program (EEP) to its maximum to secure foreign markets for U.S. Agricultural products. The 1996 Farm Bill made over $1.5 billion available for EEP in 1996–99. To date, the Administration's use of EEP has been anemic. Also, Congress needs to pass Fast Track and fully fund the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Without these tools, America, and American farmers will continue to lag behind in the international trade arena. Let's stop the erosion in farm exports. S. 2344 is a good start.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2344, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within