

He first came to the Hill to work for TOM HARKIN. He joined Senator CONRAD's staff as agriculture advisor in 1987, the year Senator CONRAD came to the Senate. He later went on to serve as Senator CONRAD's legislative director and eventually as his chief of staff.

One of Kent's great passions was the federal budget. He believed America's budget should be balanced not only economically, but morally as well.

So he fought for budgets that would enable working families to share in these good economic times, budgets that would extend the benefits of this economy beyond Wall Street, to Main Street. He fought for budgets that would allow working parents to take their children to a doctor when they're sick, budgets that would enable parents to find good, affordable day care, budgets that would allow parents to send their children to good schools—and after that, to send them on to college.

Kent had a special place in his heart for people who live close to the land—farmers and ranchers and the people who grow up in the small towns of rural America.

He grew up in one of those towns: a little farm town in Iowa—population about 600. And though he left that town long ago, he still kept it close to his heart.

Farmers and people in farm towns all over America have lost a good friend, and an extraordinary advocate. We are grateful for Kent's diligent work on: disaster relief and farm-crisis relief.

And we extend our deepest sympathy to Kent's wife, Michelle, who works for Senator HARKIN and to their two small children, 4-year-old Caitlin—"Caiti"—and 2-year-old Austin, both of whom he loved even more than he loved this place.

We also offer our condolences to Kent's father, Ken, and his mother, Evelyn; his brothers, Mel and Michael; his sister Cheri; and his many nieces and nephews. Our thoughts and prayers are with them, and with all the members of the Conrad and Harkin staffs, who are feeling this loss more deeply than probably any member of the "Capitol family."

Like Detective Gibson and Officer Chestnut, Kent Hall died too young. He was only 52 years old. But his legacy will live on—in his two little children and in the ideals he believed in so passionately, and fought for so hard, and helped transform into law.

We will miss him.

THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURE CRISIS

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, in July, less than a month and a half ago, the Senate voted unanimously on a resolution to declare there is a national crisis in agriculture, that we needed to take immediate action to address it.

Following the unanimous passage of that resolution, we passed several amendments to the agricultural appro-

priations bill designed to address the problem. We passed an amendment to require mandatory price reporting for livestock. We passed a second amendment offered by the distinguished Senator from South Dakota, Senator JOHNSON, requiring the labeling of imported meat. And we passed an amendment offered by the two hard-working Senators from North Dakota to require at least a \$500 million indemnity program for victims of multiple-year disasters.

Unfortunately, we failed to pass my amendment to lift the cap on marketing loans and extend their term by 6 months—which is probably the single most effective way to address the problem of low prices and lost income among grain farmers.

Since we considered those amendments, the farm crisis has deepened very seriously. Over the past 3 weeks, as I visited with farmers and ranchers and rural businesspeople from all over South Dakota, they told me the same story. Many of them simply will not survive the coming months unless circumstances change. Unless we can bring about a better farm economy, a more stable price in most of the commodities now being grown, we will see an attrition in agriculture the likes of which we have not seen in over a decade.

Nick Nemec, a young farmer from Holabird, SD, who testified at a hearing on July 29 on the agricultural crisis, said that when prices go down, his family's everyday expenses go up proportionately. He said, "If the Consumer Price Index was up 40% in one year, there would be riots in the streets of cities all across America. Out in farm country, we just have farm auctions."

I heard that same sentiment over and over again when I was home these past few weeks. We have already seen too many auctions. Our farmers and ranchers are very concerned, frankly, about their survival.

So the circumstances, Madam President, as I report to the Senate this afternoon, are, unfortunately, in worse shape and more precarious than they were just a month and a half ago when these amendments were offered. We must find ways to address the current crisis in American agriculture.

So I put the Senate on notice this afternoon that we will again be offering our amendment to increase the loan rate, to establish some kind of a floor in agricultural grain prices, just as we have on minimum wage across this country now for generations. We need a minimum price, because if we do not have that, all of those stories and all of those concerns can only worsen. The farm auctions will become more frequent.

So I hope we can find, in as bipartisan a fashion as is humanly possible this close to an election, legislation we can all agree upon that will allow us to address the price more effectively, that will allow us to deal with the issues we began to confront in July.

We must pass and sign into law the mandatory price reporting legislation that passed in the Senate. We must pass and sign into law the labeling legislation that was passed in the Senate. We certainly must pass this indemnity legislation and sign that into law as quickly as we can.

What is missing is what will help the grain farmers. And unless we pass that minimum floor, that increase in the loan rate, there is nothing out there that can help the grain farmers to survive what is the worst disaster they have experienced in now more than 15 years.

So, Madam President, as we begin to consider what the agenda ought to be as we come back from a month in our States, I hope everyone understands and appreciates and empathizes with the circumstances confronting America's farmers. I hope that empathy will lead to a consensus about increasing the loan rate and providing the kinds of opportunities to farmers that they failed to achieve when we debated this matter just over a month ago.

THE REMAINING SENATE AGENDA

Mr. DASCHLE. Madam President, we have 6 weeks remaining in the Congress. Those 6 weeks will define our efforts as a Congress. And this is the last matter that I wish to raise before our colleagues this afternoon—the agenda for those remaining 6 weeks.

Time is short. Distractions are many. Needless to say, we must focus on our priorities. Our success for the entire Congress will really depend on what we achieve in the next 6 weeks. It will depend on whether we are committed to accomplishing the people's business.

What is the people's business? I think everyone understands what it is. The people's business is the business that we have before us. Appropriations bills must be completed.

The Congress' first responsibility is to ensure stable Government operations. There must not be talk of a Government shutdown. I have heard some of our Republican leaders, especially on the other side, suggest that the President may shut the Government down.

Today is the last day in August. The budget resolution was due in April. So far, neither body has delivered a budget resolution. So I call upon the Republican leadership in the House and in the Senate to do what the law requires, to do what is so essential to restore confidence, to do what really is required to set the framework for the priorities and the commitments that we must make in these next 6 weeks. I call on the Republican leadership to pass a budget resolution.

Not one single appropriations bill has gone to the President. Republican poison pills appear throughout the appropriations bills. So if there is a danger of a shutdown, we all know where it originates. But it is incumbent upon

all of us to keep the Government operating. It starts with the budget resolution. And it will be completed once we pass every one of those appropriations bills, which we must do.

After we complete that task, we must turn our attention to managed care reform. The American people have said loudly and unequivocally that they want a comprehensible, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. They want to know that they can go to the nearest emergency room when they suffer a true health emergency. They want to know that they can see a specialist when they need one. They want to know that doctors—not HMO bureaucrats—will decide which treatments are medically necessary. They want to know that managed care organizations, like everyone else in the health care environment, can be held accountable for decisions that result in serious harm or death to patients.

What they do not want—what they do not want—is legislation that falls short on those or other key patient protections. They do not want legislation that claims to give them rights without providing them the mechanism necessary to enforce those rights.

There are those who suggest there is not enough time to debate a Patients' Bill of Rights. I disagree. There are those who would, for whatever reason, try to gag the Senate as we debate this important issue.

Let us eliminate the gag orders and the gag rules. Let us open up this important piece of legislation to a good, healthy debate. Democrats will be prepared to work 24 hours a day to assure that we can have that opportunity. But it is important we set it high on our agenda and our priority list as we complete our work in the 105th Congress. Other than the appropriations bills, there is nothing more important on our national agenda right now than that. The Republican bill, as everybody knows, is inadequate in many respects. We need to pass a bill that merits our support, that merits our signatures, that merits a broad-based, bipartisan commitment to real reform in managed care. We will have an opportunity to do that. And I must say that we will be offering this legislation with whatever determination may be required, and to whatever piece of legislation may be presented, in an effort to assure consideration of this legislation prior to the end of this Congress.

The third issue, beyond the budget and appropriations first, and managed care second, is campaign finance reform. In spite of the Republican leadership's opposition, the House has now passed an important campaign finance reform bill that many thought was impossible to pass just a few months ago. And so the Senate now has the opportunity—a rare opportunity—to enact meaningful reform this fall.

Madam President, we must seize the opportunity to stem the unrestricted flow of special interest money in Federal elections. There is no question

that, given what the House has already done, attention will be focused on the U.S. Senate to see if we can live up to the expectations of the American people in this regard. I, frankly, cannot think of anything more important than to take up this legislation—the Shays-Meehan bill—and give it the kind of priority it deserves, to work in a bipartisan way to pass meaningful legislation within the next 6 weeks.

Again, I will put my colleagues on notice that this issue is of such import to us that we will offer it in amendment form, if necessary. I hope that isn't necessary. I hope we can get a good opportunity and agreement to bring it up, to debate it, because it is now here. It has already been debated and passed in the House. Let's do it in the U.S. Senate.

As I have often said, we can pass legislation the easy way or the hard way. I hope we will not be required to pass it the hard way. But Democrats will make every single effort that we have available to us to pass it—hard or easy. There are many other issues that we hope we can address in the short time that we have left.

We must not ignore education. We must recognize that school modernization is essential. As I traveled through South Dakota, it was remarkable the number of times modernization needs came to my attention, the number of times school board members, school board presidents, teachers, superintendents and principals said, "We hope you can pass legislation that will allow us to deal with our crumbling infrastructure." As we speak, young children are going back into unsafe school buildings, into environments that are not conducive to learning. School modernization must be addressed. I hope we can address it this year, this Congress. I hope we can address in this Congress this year the need for 100,000 additional teachers. So as children go back to school, as we consider all of the needs of our Nation, let us not forget the importance of the needs in education.

We must look at Social Security. We must begin to consider very carefully what options are available to us. We must stop any action, whether it is on a tax bill—which I understand will be brought to the Senate floor—or elsewhere, which might jeopardize Social Security. There are those who, for short-term gain—either political or economic—would argue that we have to tap the so-called surplus. We have made the case—and I think everybody understands it—that there is no surplus unless you use Social Security trust funds. I hope that both sides of the aisle will come to the same conclusion about the inadvisability of doing that this year—or any year.

We must look at juvenile crime. We certainly will have an opportunity to debate the minimum wage. The minimum wage is, without a doubt, one of the single most important actions we can take to improve the economic stability and viability of working families

in many homes across our country. Madam President, those issues, too, must be examined and action taken before the end of this session.

As we come back after being away 1 month, we also recognize our international obligations. Just this afternoon, the President left for a very important summit with the President of Russia. We wish him well as he departs. We know how precarious circumstances now are in economic and political terms in Russia. We know how difficult this trip will be. I hope I speak for everybody in this Chamber in expressing our hope for great success, with the realization that all we can have are limited expectations, given those circumstances. We must not overlook the need for IMF funding, especially in light of the Russian crisis. We should redouble our efforts to fulfill our obligations to the International Monetary Fund. Terrorism, again, became a very important aspect of foreign policy in the last several weeks while we were gone. We must support efforts to stem it and support military efforts to respond to it.

Arms control issues in Iraq and North Korea must be addressed, and so the array of foreign policy challenges, not the least of which is an important question relating to funding in the United Nations, also must be high on our international priority list.

Madam President, obviously, to accomplish all of these important objectives, we will need to use these 6 weeks wisely, to stay focused on our Nation's needs and priorities. I hope that we can do that. Earlier today, the majority leader suggested that Democrats want to stall legislative business. Nothing could be farther from the truth. To the contrary, we are anxious, as we have been for months, to get on with the Nation's agenda, the agenda that I have outlined.

So speaking on behalf of my Democratic colleagues in the Senate, I welcome back both Republican and Democratic colleagues, and I urge them to work together to accomplish all of this and more. Time is short, the need is great, and our desire to achieve is high. I hope we can meet all of those expectations in the coming weeks.

Madam President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE NATIONAL SALVAGE MOTOR VEHICLE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, today I would like to share a few details about S. 852, the National Salvage Motor Vehicle Consumer Protection Act. As you