think it is going to take more than that to get us through this crisis, to prevent a recession from hitting America.

Total U.S. export volume has fallen nearly 6 percent this year, a very sharp reversal over the steady export increases in the preceding 6 years. In addition, the dollar value of our exports to Asia has dropped 13 percent this year while our trade deficit with Asia is projected to increase by nearly $50 billion from last year.

Prices received by U.S. exporters, including our farmers, have fallen. I represent a farm State, perhaps the most agricultural or certainly one of the most agricultural States in our Nation. I can tell you, we are already in a deep recession because of collapsing commodity prices. Those prices are at a 52-year low, adjusted for inflation. So in real terms, the prices our farmers are getting are at a 52-year low. No wonder we have just had to pass a $6 billion rescue package.

In addition, I think it is important to understand that one of the key reasons the Federal Reserve Board has been reluctant to reduce interest rates is because they are concerned about inflation. Well, I do not think inflation is the threat. There currently is virtually no inflation in the U.S. economy.

Over the last 12 months, consumer prices are up less than 2 percent; in fact, they are up about 1.7 percent. Producer prices are actually declining. We are actually experiencing deflation in producer prices. And at that very moment, the real Federal funds rate is at a very high level. The real rate is at about 4 percent. Historically, if we look at the record, the real Federal funds rate is about 2 percent. So the real rate we are paying for interest on money today is about double the historical rate.

Mr. President, that could be understood if we were facing an inflationary threat. But I believe, and I think the evidence suggests, that the greatest threat we are facing is a threat of recession. That is why I am very pleased the Federal Reserve acted today to reduce rates an additional one-quarter of 1 percent. I was disappointed when, at their last meeting, they did not cut more aggressively. And I hope they do not stop here. Further easing of interest rates is going to be necessary to avoid a very serious economic slowdown not only here but around the rest of the world.

If you look at economic history, when other countries are slowing down—and we have seen dramatic slowdowns in much of Asia, in Russia, and now we are seeing the creeping effect of that slowdown in Central America, in Latin America, and South America—the only way to prevent this all from leading to recession here at home is to give a lift to the economy. And the best and simplest and most direct way to give a lift to this economy is to lower interest rates.

As I have indicated, the real rate of interest in this country is at about double the historical rate. So certainly there is room for additional easing to avoid recession here and to help lift the rest of the world out of economic slowdown—in some cases a recession, in some cases potentially much worse than that.

Mr. President, lower interest rates will expand consumer buying power, provide an important stimulus to the U.S. economy, and help restore consumer confidence, which has dropped markedly since the beginning of the year. Businesses, of course, will also be paying less in interest costs, which will help to sustain profits and to encourage continued strong business investment. Finally, lower interest rates will make other investments in troubled economies more attractive, helping to stem capital outflows from those countries that are so deeply troubled.

Additional interest rate cuts will send important psychological reassurance to world markets and to American consumers and businesses. Cutting interest rates is, I believe, a prudent insurance policy against the threat of recession here at home and a deepening recession abroad.

The Federal Reserve Board should be commended for taking action today. And I would urge them to be prepared to take further action to avoid the kind of slowdown in this country that will only make world recovery that much more difficult.

A BUDGET AGREEMENT

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I also want to note that we have now had a budget agreement. I just heard the announcement of our colleagues that we have reached a conclusion. I know there are details still to be sorted out, but this is good news. But I must say, I do not think we are ending on a proud note. We are going to wind up with eight appropriations bills grouped together in one omnibus package.

That isn't the way we ought to do business here. And, frankly, this situation with omnibus appropriations bills has been getting worse every year. Five bills were grouped together 3 years ago; six bills were grouped together two years ago; and now eight bills will be grouped together this year. This is not the way we ought to conduct ourselves. And I think there was a failure this year, a failure for the first time in 24 years, with no budget resolution. The budget resolution, after all, is the blueprint that guides us in the appropriations process.

I think there was a substantial failure this year, the first time since we have had a Budget Act, a failure to achieve a budget resolution. That slowed the appropriations process and left us in this posture of having to group all of these bills together—which comprise a third of all federal spending—and pass them, perhaps in a vote that won't even be a recorded rollcall vote. It is a sorry spectacle and one which I think brings dishonor to this Chamber.

I hope very much we find a way to avoid this practice in the future. I hope very much that next year we would have a budget resolution, we would have it on time, or close to on time. After all, the budget resolution was supposed to have been done April 15. For the first time in 24 years we did not have a budget resolution. In addition, we missed the deadlines, although that has happened often, but always before we have achieved a budget resolution. This year, for the first time in 24 years, there was none.

I remember very well President Reagan said in his 1987 State of the Union Message that we should never again have a continuing resolution that had multiple appropriations bills all stacked together. In his budget message in February of 1988 he said very clearly to Congress, ''Don't do this anymore. Don't do it again. It is wrong.'' Yet here we are, falling back into these old ways. It is unfortunate.

With respect to this agreement, I think it is also important to say that the surplus has, by and large, been preserved. There are emergency spending measures, that Congress and its Leadership must designate as ''emergencies.'' I think one could question whether all of them really constitute emergencies, but, by and large, they are emergencies. The agriculture emergency, certainly that is an emergency response; the spending for the embassies that were destroyed by terrorist attack, certainly that constitutes emergency spending; much of the spending that is in the defense bill constitutes emergency spending.

Those items, under our own budget rules, are considered outside the normal budget process. We have avoided what some were advocating—a very massive multi-year tax reduction, which would have come directly from the Social Security surplus. I think that would have been a profound mistake. I, for one, believe the American people deserve a tax cut, but I don't think it should come from raiding Social Security surpluses.

Some of the language we use in this town is somewhat misleading. We say that there is a $70 billion surplus on a unified basis. That means when you put all of the revenue of the Federal Government in the pot and all of the spending of the Federal Government into the same pot, we have $70 billion more in terms of revenue than we have in terms of spending. But it is important to remember that is counting the Social Security funds. This year Social Security is running a $105 billion surplus. If we put the Social Security money aside—which we should do—we would still be running a budget deficit of $35 billion.

Until and unless that operating deficit is ended—and we now project that will end in 2002, and we won't be using any Social Security surpluses in that year, and we will actually balance on what I consider a true basis—until that is achieved, I don't believe it is appropriate to have new nonemergency

spending or to have unpaid-for tax cuts. If we are going to have new spending that is nonemergency spending, it ought to be paid for. If we are going to have tax reductions, they ought to be paid for. New spending and new tax breaks should not be paid for by taking it from the Social Security surplus. That is truly robbing Peter to pay Paul.

I am pleased that other than the emergency spending, we don't have new spending that is not offset by cuts in other spending. I am also pleased that we didn't embark on a risky tax cut scheme that would have been paid for, in whole, out of Social Security surpluses. I believe that would have been irresponsible.

I am remiss if I do not end on a note on agriculture. As I indicated, agriculture is critically important to my State. North Dakota has 40 percent of its State's income, 40 percent of its State's economy, based on agriculture. North Dakota, like many agricultural States, is in deep trouble. From 1996 to 1997, we saw farm income decline 98 percent. That is a disaster. That is an emergency by any definition. It is the result of a combination of the lowest prices in 52 years, coupled with natural disasters that have spread the disease called scab through our fields which have reduced production, coupled with bad policy. Frankly, it is a trade policy that allows unfairly traded Canadian grain to sweep into our country, displacing our own grain, reducing our own prices, putting enormous pressure on our farm producers.

In the midst of all of this, our chief competitors, the Canadians and the Europeans, are spending 10 times as much as we are to support their farm producers. They are spending nearly $50 billion a year while we are spending, under the new farm bill, about $5 billion a year.

Those are the pressures that our producers are under. It is an emergency. It is a disaster. I am very pleased that we have responded with a $6 billion package. I want to be swift to say that is not enough. The pain felt by farm families and the hole in income in farm country is so deep that even $6 billion won't fill it, but it will certainly help. We have come a long way from the moment in July that I offered on this floor a $500 million indemnity payment plan for those areas devastated by natural disaster.

I say a special thanks to my colleague, Senator DORGAN, who cosponsored that amendment, and to Senator CRAIG, of Idaho, who is on the floor, who gave great help and support to us in that effort and who has played a leading role in trying to win greater support as the need increased, as natural disasters spread from our part of the country to other parts. We saw later this year drought conditions in Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana, and hurricanes that affected much of the coastal areas of the southeastern United States. It started in our part of the country but it spread. That required a greater response. Again, I thank my colleague, Senator CRAIG, for the very constructive role that he played in assisting us to get a much stronger, more robust package of disaster assistance.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CRAIG. Let me thank my colleague from North Dakota for those kind words. While he and I might disagree on policy as it relates to how we respond to American agriculture, we did not disagree and we do not disagree on the need. There are consequences if we fail to respond to that need at a time when markets are being taken away from production agriculture in this country. We have seen dramatic declines in commodity prices across the board.

He and I agree on Canadian trade policy. We are very frustrated by what appears to be a one-way flow of commodities out of Canada with very little moving from our side into Canada; and when it attempts to move, finding all kinds of restrictions.

I must tell the Senator from North Dakota I have been very frustrated with this administration, that they have not taken a more aggressive role in trying to determine why those differences have come about and responding to them. Thanks to our Governors, collectively, and our urging, the administration is now making some response in that area. I hope it is very, very productive.

Canadians need to understand that under the North American Free Trade Agreement it is not a one-way street, nor should it be.

I would agree also with my colleague from North Dakota as it relates to the response by the chairman of the Federal Reserve today. We probably would not differ on our concern over the analysis of the current world economic situation. I hope that our economy will respond to lower interest rates, but I must say that our economy also responds to tax cuts. Our economy also responds when consumers are having to pay less to their Federal Government and are allowed more of their own hard-earned money to stay in their pockets.

But this administration was adamant this year, and we were unable to effectively respond to what I thought, and others thought, was a need for a reasonable tax cut in certain areas. There is an interesting analysis that we have just done as it relates to the obstructive nature of policy used on the floor of the Senate this year by our colleagues on the other side. In the last four years, the need for cloture—that is a term used here in a procedural effort to shut down a filibuster effort so that we can proceed to deal with a bill—had to be used four times more than in the preceding years under a Democrat-controlled Senate. In other words, there was a concerted effort this year by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to simply stop the process, to slow it down, to force cloture, to seek endless debates.

So it becomes very frustrating when you are trying to do the business of the citizens, to move a timely budget process, a timely appropriations process that requires the necessary voting on 13 different appropriations bills to fund Government, to get it done when, day after day, debate is made on issues that are not relevant to the procedure and, in some instances, not relevant to the policy at hand. But that is a tactic that can be used and is legitimate before the Senate. I am not denying its legitimacy; I am denying the repetitiveness in which it was used as compared to the prior four years under a Democrat Senate, with George Mitchell as leader of the U.S. Senate. There has been nearly a four times greater need to file cloture so as to move the process forward. In other words, was there a directed effort to slow down the Congress, to slow down the Senate this year? I think the statistics and the history will clearly demonstrate that is the case.

Be that as it may, it was important that we ultimately finish our work and that we adjourn. We are now on the eve of an adjournment because our work is done. We now have completed the appropriations process. We have done so in a way that dealt with the needs of this administration and the balance of power that, by Constitution, must and does occur in our Government. I will tell you that the end product isn't all that I would like, and there is a lot in it that I don't care for. But that is not unusual in any process where compromise is necessary to produce a final product.

So I am pleased to say that that final product has been produced, that our majority leader labored mightily with the speaker, with representatives from the administration, and with representatives of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to resolve this issue. Should it have been done here on the floor in open debate? Yes. If we hadn't had to file over 100 cloture motions in the last four years, the process would have been much different. But that is the character of the Senate itself, and those are the rules under which we operate. Having to deal with those rules and the obstructive nature that can be applied to the process, I think we can declare a successful session. I hope that is the case in the end.

Is the surplus produced by a balanced budget, which Republicans are proud of, intact? Yes, it is, by a very large amount. But it is also important to say that we never argued in the first place that all of the surplus would be held intact, and that it must be guaranteed to Social Security. That was a marker the President laid down. And while we agreed with him that there was adequate money in the surplus to reform Social Security for present and future purposes, it was the President that laid that marker down and, just in the last 48 hours, has tried to redefine what he

meant by the marker. I am sorry, Mr. President, ''is'' is. Let me repeat that for the President. Mr. President, ''is'' is. We don't need to redefine it. We explain it. We totally understand it. We know what you said in your budget statement. All of the surplus went to Social Security, except you wanted about $20 billion of it to go somewhere else without getting blamed for it, and were simply saying that the argument is much different. We have used a very limited amount of moneys that we had not appropriated that could arguably be called surplus.

But the surplus is intact. The budget is balanced. There is adequate money to begin what I think is a generational opportunity to not only assure and guarantee Social Security in the outyears beyond 2020 but, most importantly, to guarantee that it is done in a way so that our children and our grandchildren will not have to pay excessively to get a reasonable return on a guaranteed retirement annuity as Social Security has become. Those are the issues that we will deal with in a new Congress, and those are issues that are going to be paramount to the strength and stability of our country, and to the well-being of our citizens. I hope that we will deal with them in a reasonable and bipartisan fashion, because the correct solution to Social Security must be bipartisan by its nature and by its definition, and I am sure that we can accomplish that.

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

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

THE CALENDAR

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Judiciary Committee be discharged from consideration of Senate Resolution 129 and that the Senate proceed to its consideration and to the consideration of the following private relief bills and resolutions en bloc:

Calendar No. 604, S. 1460; Calendar No. 603; S. 1202; Calendar No. 672, S. 1961; Calendar No. 605, S. 1551; Calendar No. 669, S. 1171; Calendar No. 671, S. 1916; Calendar No. 675, S. 2476; Calendar No. 673; S. 1926; Calendar No. 678, Senate Resolution 283; and S. 2637.

I ask unanimous consent that the committee amendments be agreed to, the measures be considered read a third time and passed, the title amendments be agreed to, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bills appear at this point in the RECORD.

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

PRIVATE RELIEF BILL

The bill (S. 1406) for the relief of Alexandre Malofienko, Olga Matsko, and their son, Vladimir Malofienko, was considered, read the third time, and passed; as follows:

S. 1460

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

SECTION 1. PERMANENT RESIDENCE.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purposes of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.), Alexandre Malofienko, Olga Matsko, and their son, Vladimir Malofienko, shall be held and considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence as of the date of the enactment of this Act upon payment of the required visa fees.

SEC. 2. REDUCTION OF NUMBER OF AVAILABLE VISAS.

Upon the granting of permanent residence to Alexandre Malofienko, Olga Matsko, and their son, Vladimir Malofienko, as provided in this Act, the Secretary of State shall instruct the proper officer to reduce by the appropriate number during the current fiscal year the total number of immigrant visas available to natives of the country of the aliens' birth under section 203(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1153(a)).

PRIVATE RELIEF BILL

The bill (S. 1202) providing for the relief for Sergio Lozano, Fauricio, and Ana Lozano, was considered, read the third time, and passed; as follows:

S. 1202

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

SECTION 1. PERMANENT RESIDENCE.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purposes of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.), Sergio Lozano, Fauricio Lozano, and Ana Lozano, shall be held and considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence as of the date of the enactment of this Act upon payment of the required visa fees.

PRIVATE RELIEF LEGISLATION

The bill (S. 1961) for the relief of Suchada Kwong, was considered, read the third time, and passed; as follows:

S. 1961

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

SECTION 1. PERMANENT RESIDENCE.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purposes of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.), Suchada Kwong shall be held and considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence as of the date of the enactment of this Act upon payment of the required visa fees.

PRIVATE RELIEF BILL

The bill (S. 1551) for the relief of Kerantha Poole-Christian, was considered, read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 1551

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

SECTION 1. CLASSIFICATION AS A CHILD UNDER THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—In the administration of the Immigration and Nationality Act, Kerantha Poole-Christian shall be classified as a child within the meaning of section 101(b)(1)(E) of such Act, upon approval of a petition filed on her behalf by Clifton or Linette Christian, citizens of the United States, pursuant to section 204 of such Act.

(b) LIMITATION.—No natural parent, brother, or sister, if any, of Kerantha Poole-Christian shall, by virtue of such relationship, be accorded any right, privilege, or status under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

PRIVATE RELIEF LEGISLATION

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill (S. 1171) for the Janina Altagracia Castillo-Rojas and her husband, Diogenes Patricio Rojas, which had been reported from the Committee on the Judiciary, with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. CERTIFICATE OF CITIZENSHIP.

(a) CITIZENSHIP STATUS.—Upon the filing of an application for a certificate of citizenship and upon being administered the oath of renunciation and allegiance described in section 337(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, Janina Altagracia Castillo-Rojas shall be held and considered to be a citizen of the United States from birth pursuant to section 301(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1401(g)) and shall be furnished by the Attorney General with a certificate of citizenship.

(b) SUPERSEDES EXISTING LAW.—This section supersedes the parental physical presence requirement in section 301(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1401(g)) and any other provision of law.

The committee substitute was agreed to.

The bill (S. 1171), as amended, was considered, read the third time, and passed.

The title was amended so as to read: ''For the relief of Janina Altagracia Castillo-Rojas.''.

PRIVATE RELIEF LEGISLATION

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill (S. 2476) for the relief of Wei Jengsheng, which had been reported from the Committee on the Judiciary, with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. PERMANENT RESIDENCE.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purposes of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.), Wei Jingsheng shall be held and considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence as of the date of the enactment of this Act upon payment of the required visa fee.

SEC. 2. REDUCTION OF NUMBER OF AVAILABLE VISAS.

Upon the granting of permanent residence to Wei Jingsheng as provided in this Act, the Secretary of State shall instruct the proper officer to reduce by one during the current fiscal year the total number of immigrant visas available to natives of the country of the alien's birth under section 203(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1153(a)).