

Located in the heart of America's breadbasket, Iowa's agricultural heritage goes back many generations. Iowans appreciate how significant our food system is, not only to basic human existence, but to the State's economy and also to our way of life.

As the leading producer of corn, soybeans, hogs, and eggs in America, Iowa's high-quality agricultural bounty would make George Washington proud. The farmer and our first President, George Washington, once said:

Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful, and most noble employment to man.

At the turn of the 21st century, Iowa is working to stay on the leading edge of the research and use its bounty to benefit biotechnology and advances in life science. Whether growing crops for pharmaceutical use or raising cattle capable of producing proteins that can be used for human drug therapies, Iowa has significant potential to create good, high-paying jobs and reap economic benefits in ways unimaginable at the turn of the last century when the production of food was all that was on farmers' minds.

With several farmer-owned ethanol plants up and running, Iowa also is fueling local economic activity and helping to increase our energy independence by turning home-grown corn into ethanol, lessening our dependence upon a foreign source such as Iraq, for instance.

As a life-long family farmer, I take advantage of every opportunity in Washington, DC, in Congress, like now in this Senate Chamber, to serve as a farmer's advocate because I want to make sure that family farmers' voices are heard at the policy tables in Washington. Notwithstanding the need to keep our food production and supply system safe from sabotage, Americans are blessed to live in a Nation where food security does not mean wondering if there is enough food available to feed one's family every day.

National Agriculture Week, March 16 to 22, is a good opportunity to showcase American agriculture and to give thanks to those who work hard to get high quality, affordable food from the farm to our table. I hope every one of those people living in urban America who might think that food grows in super markets rather than on farms would give a thought to the usefulness of the family farm and what it contributes to the quality of life of Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I first want to commend the Senator for his eloquent statement. I think it is always important to remind Americans, no matter where they live, of the productivity of American agriculture and the importance, particularly, of our family farmers. There is no one who is a greater advocate for America's farmers than the Senator from Iowa. So I am very pleased to have had the privilege of hearing his comments today.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of the legislation are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

POST-BALANCED BUDGET ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I want to discuss the upcoming budget resolution and its impact on home health agencies. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Post-Balanced Budget Act reductions in home health care have totaled more than \$72 billion between fiscal years 1998 and 2002. This is more than four times the \$16 billion that CBO originally estimated for that time period and it is a clear indication that the Medicare home health cutbacks have been far deeper than Congress ever intended.

As a consequence of these reductions, cost-efficient home health agencies across the country have experienced acute financial difficulties and cashflow problems which have inhibited their ability to deliver vital care. Home health spending has been cut in half since 1997. More than 3,400 home health care agencies have either closed their doors or stopped serving Medicare patients. Moreover, the number of Medicare patients receiving home health care nationwide has dropped by 1.3 million, more than a third. This points out the most central and critical issue: Cuts of this magnitude simply cannot be sustained without ultimately affecting patient care, without ultimately diminishing the provision of care to some of the most vulnerable citizens in our Nation.

It, therefore, is my intent to offer an amendment to the budget resolution this week calling on the Senate to stabilize and promote fairness in Medicare home health reimbursements by avoiding further cuts in home health spending, preserving the full market basket update, and restoring funding for this important benefit, including the extension of the 10 percent rural add-on reimbursement I have discussed today. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will make a few comments in morning business. I agree with the Senator from Maine. As cochairman of the Rural Health Caucus in the Senate, we have been working for a very long time and will continue to work for equity payments between urban and rural areas. In this instance, in-home health care costs are often higher in rural areas.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REFORM

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will talk a moment about an issue that has been important to Wyoming and to the entire country. As in many cases, the things we do here and the national

laws we pass have different effects in different places. Wyoming, being a rather large State, a rural State, is 50 percent owned by the Federal Government. When we talk about endangered species, the program works much differently than it does in Delaware. There needs to be a certain amount of flexibility, as is the case with many things we do.

I am for endangered species acts. It is proper we have programs that protect various endangered species, whether they be plants or animals. That should continue. However, we have been in this program now since about 1970 and there are, from our experience, changes we ought to consider. I am convinced this program needs some kind of change.

Unfortunately, the results we have had are not the kind of results we intended. There has been a large amount of listing of endangered species but very little recovery. Of course, the purpose, the bottom line, is intended to protect special species and to recover them so they are self-supporting. We are hopeful we can strengthen the program to some degree so we can emphasize the recovery rather than simply the listing. The listing has an impact, particularly where there are interspersed private and public lands. What is done in public lands affects those on private lands.

Because of the way lands were developed in the West with the Homestead Act, part of the lands were homesteaded and are now private. Those that were public are used by those folks with leases and they intermingle. It is an overlapping issue.

We have had several experiences in our State and particularly with the States surrounding Yellowstone Park—Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming—particularly with grizzly bears. Everyone recognizes the importance and wants to maintain the grizzly bear. They were developed in the park to refurbish them. We have long since, several years ago, surpassed the numbers in the plan for total recovery numbers, but they are still not de-listed; they are still listed and treated as endangered because we cannot come together on what the range ought to be. We cannot figure it out to get them de-listed.

The same thing is true with wolves. We have wolves that were there years ago and they left. The Park Service re-imported them from Canada and put them in Yellowstone Park. We knew they would not stay in Yellowstone Park and, of course, they did not. We have the same sort of problem with a predatory animal that is now in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, and it is managed as an endangered species. For people who have property at risk, sometimes even humans at risk, there is not much that can be done as long as these critters are endangered.

We seek to get a plan so they can be endangered in Yellowstone Park, but the States surrounding can have a plan to manage the animals so there is some