Who is thinking about this in a concrete way? I trust that Jim Baker and Lee Hamilton are. I hope that my colleagues are.

You may not like all of my ideas. You may reject all of them. But whatever ideas come to the fore, let us debate the substance in tolerance and good faith, open to new thinking and hungering for new action.

The American people are watching us, wondering if we have heard their call for a new way forward. The Iraqi people are watching us, wondering if their united country can still survive and succeed. Americans and Iraqis both want what it is within our power to give them: hope.

Again, I thank the President for his indulgence in providing a little more time.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

TAX EXTENDERS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise to address two matters that will be taken up by the Senate in this lameduck session. The first will be after we come back from the Thanksgiving holiday. We will be taking up a tax bill that will include a group of what we call tax extenders. These are tax breaks that are in existing law which are running out of time. They are going to cease to exist by the 1st of the year, unless we extend these tax breaks. One of those tax breaks is very important to our State of Florida. In fact, six States in this Union do not have a personal income tax at the State level. Whereas, those 44 States that do have the personal income tax are able to deduct that State income tax in the calculation of their Federal income tax, in those six States that do not have the State income tax, they have no such deduction. But their main revenue stream is a State sales tax.

The deduction of that State sales tax has been a major help to constituents in those six States, including my State of Florida. It has saved, for example, the people of the State of Florida $750 million per year in Federal income taxes by being able to deduct their Florida State sales tax.

It is my understanding that this is all worked out; that, in fact, we are going to be able to extend all of these tax extenders and that it will be done in the week of the lameduck session when we come back after the Thanksgiving holiday. That, of course, is enormously important.

I had a hand, along with Senator HUTCHISON of Texas, in passing that bill to begin with, but that bill was effective for 2 years. That 2 years is about to expire at the end of this calendar year. So we certainly need that extended.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG AMENDMENT

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I also want to speak on a matter that Senator VITTER and I will introduce shortly, for there will be in front of the Senate an appropriations bill that will fund the Food and Drug Administration. Senator VITTER will offer, on behalf of himself and myself, an amendment that we had offered to the Senate on a different appropriations bill several months ago—and passed—that would allow Americans to purchase low-cost prescription drugs from Canada.

Every year, millions of Americans, who cannot otherwise afford their prescriptions at pharmacies, seek those same FDA-approved prescriptions from Canada at significantly lower prices.

Back in July, Senator VITTER and I introduced a separate amendment on this issue to the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill. Our amendment prohibited Customs from stopping the importation of FDA-approved prescription drugs by American citizens.

The amendment was in response to a new policy implemented by U.S. Customs which resulted in over 38,000 prescription drug shipments being detained by Federal officials. Our amendment received overwhelming bipartisan support when it was added to the Senate bill.

This Senator started receiving complaints as far back as 2½ years ago. They had been ordering prescriptions from Canada for years, and suddenly Customs was confiscating their prescriptions. Customs has admitted that it was to the tune of almost 40,000 prescriptions.

To a senior citizen who is so desperate to make financial ends meet—and, in fact, sadly, in America in the year 2006, some senior citizens are having to make a choice because of their financial condition between buying their groceries or buying their prescription medicines. They are forced to do things such as cutting their medicine tablets in half to try to stretch it out when, in fact, their doctor tells them that is not what they should be doing. Yet it is happening.

Over and over again, seniors have been able to order from Canadian pharmacists at half the cost of their prescription medicine. It is not a question of safety because it is made by the same manufacturer and even with the same packaging.

Back in the summer, Senator VITTER and I saw an opportunity on an appropriations bill to prohibit Customs from using the appropriated moneys for the seizure of those kinds of individual purchases for a small duration of time—no more than a 90-day supply of their prescriptions and only from Canada.

We passed it in the Senate overwhelmingly. It goes down to a House-Senate conference committee, and they watered down that provision to say that it can be done to bring those small, limited, individual supplies of prescription drugs from Canada but only if you bring it personally back from Canada.

That may help my two colleagues who are from the State of North Dakota because they are right next to the Canadian border. But clearly for the States of Senator VITTER and myself and the States in the Southeastern United States, that doesn't help at all, particularly since some of our seniors have been accustomed to ordering these much less expensive drugs by mail or by e-mail or by telephone calls.

When it got to the conference committee, they watered down the provision. That is what we are going to address today. I am waiting on Senator VITTER to come to the floor so we can offer this amendment.

We have a new opportunity on an appropriations bill that includes the Food and Drug Administration appropriations. This does not assure Americans access to lower cost medications from Canada, since the FDA can still hold up the imports if they choose to do so under current law. That is why we are going to add this amendment to prevent the FDA from interfering with the importation of prescription drugs from Canada.

A little bit of good news came out the last time we tried to do this with regard to the Customs Department. In October, Customs threw up its hands and said: We have more important things to do on the huge import of drugs that are counterfeit. That is what we are going after. We are not going to confiscate these individual purchases of a 90-day supply or less which are prescriptions from Canadian pharmacists.

With that as a precedent, it would seem to me that the Senate would certainly go along with us and put this in the law right now with regard to the FDA to make sure that this policy is very clear.

When Congress returns in January, we should look at, additionally, what is introduced by my colleague who is on the floor now, Senator DORGAN, and Senator SNOWE, the Pharmaceutical Market Access and Drug Safety Act.

This bipartisan bill, which I support, is going to set up a comprehensive system for importation of prescription drugs which will further help our senior citizens on lower prescription drug costs.

Ultimately, we will have to debate the very essence of the problem in Medicare prescription drug benefits, Part D benefits. That is going to be a whole new debate that we will have out here on how to fill the doughnut hole which some people say would cost something like $26 billion. But there is a way to do that—by allowing Medicare to do what other parts of the Federal Government have done for years, including the Veterans' Administration and the Department of Defense; that is, use the bulk purchasing power to negotiate lower prices for drugs.

As most people know, that was prohibited in the Medicare prescription drug benefit. But I think we are going to be addressing that because that is a

huge stake in the heart of the purchasing power of Medicare for 43 million senior citizens to be able to negotiate those prices down by bulk purchases.

It is clearly time for the Congress to stand up for our constituents and to help lower these prescription drug prices.

I am looking forward to working with Senators in a bipartisan way to embrace this Vitter-Nelson amendment.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, my colleague from Florida was describing the issue of prescription drug pricing in our country—an amendment that would be offered to a subsequent appropriations bill dealing with the FDA and its enforcement of the reimportation of prescription drugs.

Let me point out, as he properly said, that Senator SNOWE and myself and others, a large bipartisan group, Senators MCCAIN and KENNEDY, introduced legislation—and have been blocked from having it considered for some many months in the Senate—dealing with the comprehensive approach to reimportation of FDA-approved drugs.

The American consumer is now charged the highest prices for prescription drugs in the entire world. Let me say that again. The American consumer is charged the highest prices for prescription drugs anywhere in the world. It is not fair. That pricing policy has to change. One of the ways to change it will be to put downward pressure on pricing in this country by allowing American consumers to access those identical FDA-approved drugs, some of which are actually made in this country; to reimport them from other countries, FDA-approved, made and manufactured in manufacturing plants approved by the FDA.

My colleague talked about Canada and the United States. That is an obvious issue. My State borders Canada, and we see people coming back and forth going to Canada to purchase prescription drugs, in some cases for one-tenth the price they are charged in this country.

We need to find a way to pass the comprehensive legislation. My colleague from Florida cosponsored that bill and worked with us on it—myself, Senator SNOWE from Maine, Senator MCCAIN, Senator GRASSLEY, Senator KENNEDY, a pretty significant bipartisan group in the Senate. We have not had a vote on that only because it has been blocked. We will have a vote on that in the next session of Congress if we are not able to offer it in the coming weeks. In the next session of Congress, we will have a vote on it.

We will have very substantial numbers in the Senate supporting that legislation. When we do, it will be good news for American consumers who now pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. That is unfair. I certainly support the amendment that deals with a funding limitation that would be offered as described by my colleague from Florida. That in itself does not solve the larger problem. He has indicated that. I believe Senator VITTER would indicate that as well. It is a step in the right direction.

I am supportive of it with the understanding that we will have a more comprehensive piece of legislation on this issue which will be introduced, will be offered, and will be voted on with a very large majority in the Senate. The House of Representatives has already demonstrated its support for such a plan. If we can't get it done in the lameduck session, as soon as we turn the calendar and begin a new year, I am convinced we will get this done.

I appreciated the words of my colleague from Florida.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The senior Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

FARMER DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, yesterday I withdrew an amendment to provide disaster assistance to farmers and ranchers for the disasters of 2005 and 2006. I did so on the basis of an assurance by the majority leader that is in the RECORD very clearly: we would go to the Agriculture appropriations bill today, I would have a chance to offer my amendment today, the rights of all Senators were protected, and that they would have their rights. Now I am told there is an objection to going to the Agriculture appropriations bill.

I say to my colleagues, that leaves me with no alternative but to object to other business. I, in good faith, removed my amendment yesterday, took it down, with the assurance—and that is in the RECORD, very clearly in the RECORD—from the majority leader, the assurance that we would go to Agriculture appropriations today. I alert my colleagues I kept my word. I would hope others would keep theirs.

If that is not to be, I will be in a position in which I will be objecting to any other business coming before the Senate. If they want to have a live quorum, we can go through that exercise, but we will go through it repeatedly. This is not fair. It is not right. We have tried repeatedly to get this bill up so we can have a vote. It has previously passed the Senate with 77 votes in favor.

What we are asking for is not unreasonable. We have reduced the cost dramatically. Here, a person's word is their bond. I kept my word. I am expecting others to keep theirs.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, my colleague was on the Senate floor yesterday, as I was, and he was offering an amendment on the Military Construction appropriations bill dealing with agricultural disaster. In exchange for withdrawing that amendment on the Military Construction bill, he was given some assurance that the Agriculture appropriations bill would come next to the Senate and he would be able to offer that amendment on the Agriculture appropriations bill.

Let me, first of all, support my colleague, Senator CONRAD. He knows and I know that the Agriculture appropriations bill includes a disaster piece that I added in the committee many months ago. That amendment I offered in the committee was one we had worked on with Senator CONRAD and many other Senators on a bipartisan basis. It was Senator CONRAD and myself who were recognized in the committee to offer the agricultural disaster plan. That was in the spring of this year.

Subsequent to that, we have now had a very substantial drought that has enveloped a fair part of this country, devastating some additional crops, and we have not been able to get the Agriculture appropriations bill back to the Senate so we can make an adjustment to the disaster plan for farmers, an adjustment to include the 2006 disaster, but we have not been able to get it to the floor of the Senate. That is why my colleague, Senator CONRAD, offered it yesterday as an amendment to the Military Construction bill. We have already passed it twice in the Senate; that is, an agricultural disaster plan.

Two times I added it in the Appropriations Committee. On two occasions—I believe both were with supplemental bills—both occasions we went to a conference with the House of Representatives. I had money in for a farm disaster plan. In both circumstances, we went to the conference; the Senate conferees, at my request, had a vote, insisted on the Senate position which included an agricultural disaster plan for family farmers who got hit with the weather disaster; and on both occasions the President threatened a veto and got the House conferees, at the request of the Speaker, to object. Therefore, twice it got knocked out in a conference.

The third time now, I have added the farm disaster piece to the Agriculture appropriations bill. We did that before this growing season in which we had a very devastating drought, so that needs to be adjusted.

My colleague, Senator CONRAD, is offering the farm disaster piece that would try to reach out to those family farmers who now do not know whether they will be able to continue farming, reach out with a helping hand to say: You are not alone. We cannot make