

Trust Fund to allow all 50 States to beef up bridge inspections and rebuild or renovate their most deficient bridges. That additional spending authority came about as a result of my amendment, which passed on the floor back in early September. I want to thank the many Republican Senators who supported me on that vote.

Now the President's budget was formulated and delivered to Congress before the Minneapolis tragedy. But I just think it is wrong that the President hasn't altered his budget priorities one penny in the wake of that reality.

Both sides of the aisle in Congress have heard the wake-up call on the need to address our most critical, deteriorating infrastructure. Yet the President would rather spend \$196 billion on the war than help our communities ensure their safety.

Our conference agreement also helps protect homeowners who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. It spends more than the President's request because the conferees—Democrats and Republicans alike—didn't hide from the subprime mortgage crisis that is threatening to destroy many middle-income communities across the Nation.

In the next two quarters, more than 2 million homeowners throughout the Nation will see their mortgage payments rise. Many of them will struggle or fail to meet these new, higher payments. We are now seeing communities where every other home—or every third home—is being abandoned by homeowners who can't meet their payments. Whole communities are having their economic underpinnings ripped from beneath them. Many of these near-ghost towns have been concentrated in the industrial Midwest. But Senators must know—if something isn't done to address this crisis soon, we will find these communities all across the country.

Our conference agreement includes a special infusion of \$200 million to boost housing counseling efforts to help keep struggling mortgage-holders in their homes. It is the same level that was included in the Senate version of the bill—a 500-percent increase over the current level. And rather than send this additional funding into the HUD bureaucracy, we have sent it out for competitive grants through the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation—a federally chartered corporation that specializes in this area.

I am especially proud that this agreement helps protect our veterans, who—tragically—now make up a quarter of the homeless population.

Veterans Day just passed. In the speech I delivered in my home State, I said we ought to be asking what we can do—as a community, a state, and a nation—for our veterans. The conferees on our Transportation-Housing bill—Democrats and Republicans alike—refused to turn their back on the realities facing our returning heroes from

Iraq and Afghanistan and all past conflicts. So our bill took one step in the right direction for our veterans. It includes \$75 million for additional housing vouchers, which provide housing assistance through HUD, as well as supportive services through the VA to help get our heroes back on their feet.

This isn't the first year the President has tried to underfund our Nation's housing and transportation system. The cuts this Congress refused to adopt this year are the very same reckless cuts proposed by the Bush administration in 2007, in 2006, in 2005, and every other year. The President has been proposing to slash funding for the CDBG Program, for elderly and disabled housing, for Amtrak, and for airports—year, after year, after year. This year was no different—and Congress responded the same way. The only difference between this year and prior years is that this year President Bush is threatening to veto the bill. And the Senate Republican leadership is determined to protect him from having to make that hard decision.

But the American people don't care about party politics. They care about whether their bridges are safe enough to travel on. They care about whether they will have to sit for hours in the airport because their flights were delayed. They care—when they are sitting on a train platform—about whether the train is actually going to arrive. And they care about our homeless veterans and the need to keep struggling mortgage-holders in their homes.

Our conference committee addressed those realities head-on and came up with a bipartisan solution. I only wish the Senate Republican leadership had these concerns of the American people on their minds rather than their need to protect a misguided President who is so out of touch with the American people.

We learned today where bipartisanship begins and ends for the Senate Republican leadership. It begins with empty, insincere rhetoric on the Senate floor. And it ends when it comes to the need to protect President Bush. When the American people wonder why important legislation is not passing out of the Senate, they should look at this example, one where the Senate Republican leadership is blocking progress on a bill that bears the signature of every Republican who worked on it—one where the needs of the American people are thrown out the window in favor of the need to protect a failed President.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO SENATOR BYRD

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, might I be recognized for a moment to comment, as the Senator from West Virginia did, on the birthday of Senator BYRD?

I will be very brief. Certainly, Senator ROCKEFELLER, being Senator BYRD's colleague, with great emotion, I noted, commented on his colleague's birthday.

I hope perhaps coming from someone on the other side of the aisle it will be equally meaningful to recognize Senator BYRD's birthday, but also recognizing his long service here, not just his birthday.

We all hope we can continue to achieve those birthdays, but more important is the ability to represent the people of our State, the people of the United States, and do so over a long and distinguished career.

There are few who have matched Senator BYRD in that regard. I join Senator ROCKEFELLER in extending my best wishes to Senator BYRD, someone who, like me, loves bluegrass music. The only difference is he can play it; I cannot. Happy birthday, Senator.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Ohio has the floor.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I join in wishing Senator BYRD a happy 90th birthday. I first heard Senator BYRD speak, and for that matter play his fiddle, in 1974 in Shelby, OH, a city in north central Ohio.

I was a candidate, right out of school, for the State legislature. I knew of Senator BYRD's reputation, but I never heard him play the fiddle, and I was honored by his coming to this small town and playing the fiddle for the assembled 200 or 300 people.

I also had the pleasure of listening to Senator BYRD earlier this year as a freshman member of this body as he spoke to the Democratic caucus lunch. He talked about his background. He was born during the flu epidemic. It took members of his and so many families' lives, and his struggles, as Senator ROCKEFELLER said, made him into the scholar and the fighter for economic justice that he has been.

Then I had the pleasure of visiting Senator BYRD in his office my first month on the job. He then came out during my maiden speech on the Senate floor and made a comment that my daughter talks about to this day. He said: Senator BROWN's words will be in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD not for 100 years but 1,000 years. And my daughter called me up right afterward and said Senator BYRD said the words will be in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD in 1,000 years.

But more important than that, he gave me his collection of speeches on the history of the Roman Senate, something we all, as newer Members of the body, should have the opportunity, and should take advantage of the opportunity to learn from his writings about the Roman Senate, how we can make this Senate work better than sometimes it does.

I would finally say, as the Senator from the State on the other side of the Ohio River, we share Parkersburg and Marietta and Belpre. We share Wheeling and Belmont County, Saint Clairsville, Bellaire, Flushing, across the river, and all up and down the river. People on my side of the river have such great admiration—of course,

they do in West Virginia, but they have such great admiration on my side of the river for the terrific work Senator BYRD has done.

I only have 4 or 5 minutes I would like to say about Thanksgiving and the farm bill. But if Senator BYRD would like to take time before that, I am certainly willing to yield or I can proceed.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I have some comments. They will be short, but I will save them for next Tuesday, which the Lord willing, at that time I will say a few things. I thank the Chair. I thank the Senator. I thank all of the Senators. I thank all the Members and the staff who make it possible for us to do our work. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Have a good Thanksgiving.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Ohio.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, today the Senate will break for the Thanksgiving holiday. We will all travel back to our States. We will work in our offices. We will move around our States. We will probably celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday with our families and our friends.

Many of us who are so very blessed will gather together next Thursday at tables surrounded by family, echoing with laughter, overflowing with food.

For too many families in my home State of Ohio and across the Nation next Thursday will be very different. These families, many of whom work full-time, simply do not earn enough each month to survive without the assistance of food stamps and food banks and help from churches and help from other organizations.

Too many families suffering from layoffs—layoffs caused by plant closings, the offshoring of jobs, and the downsizing of American industry—are now solely reliant on food stamps and food banks to feed their families. Adding anguish to heartache, food banks, the last hope many have for getting even just one meal a day, are finding themselves running short on food.

Yesterday's Cincinnati Enquirer told the story of Denise Arnold, a mother from Roselawn, OH, a suburb of Cincinnati. Since losing her job, and while looking for another job, Ms. Arnold has fallen behind on her rent and worries about becoming homeless. She has applied for food stamps, but that process takes time, and she has a son to feed.

Ms. Arnold visits the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry industry to get what food she can for her family. She told the reporter: It is really rough. I have been so scared. The pantry once was able to offer a week's supply of food to those in need. Now, because of budget cuts and inadequate funding, this pantry must ration out, as so many others do, to their visitors, a few days' worth at a time, not a full week.

According to yesterday's newspaper article, food pantries across the region have similar stories to report. On this floor, I have shared the story of Rhonda Stewart, a single mother from Butler County, OH, who relies on food stamps to feed her family.

Ms. Stewart bravely shared her story before the Senate Agriculture Committee several months ago as we began the process of writing the 2007 farm bill. She told us she has a young son and is fairly recently divorced. Her husband—her ex-husband—has lost his job and is not able to support the son or his former wife.

She has a full-time job, only making about \$9 an hour. She is president of the local PTA and volunteers for the Cub Scouts. She teaches Sunday school. She does everything we ask of a citizen and a parent, and she is a food stamp beneficiary.

Yet, she told us, at the beginning of the month, she and her son—she cooks pork chops once or twice that first week. That is his favorite meal. By the middle of the month, she takes him out to a fast food restaurant perhaps once or twice. By the end of the month, she always runs out of money. She sits at the dining room or the kitchen table with her son, and that last couple of days of the month at dinnertime he is eating dinner, and she is sitting there not eating.

He says: Mom, what is wrong?

She says: I am not feeling well, or I am not hungry. She said it happens month after month.

The truth is, food stamps provide a benefit of about \$1 per person per meal. So Rhonda Stewart was getting \$6 per day for food stamps. She traveled to Washington to let us know what mattered most to her and to her family and to families like hers. She had every right to expect that we would listen and we would hear her.

In 2006, more than 35 million Americans went hungry. We must ask ourselves, how many more will go hungry next Thursday and Friday and Saturday and Sunday and into the rest of the holiday season?

I raise this issue today because at this moment we are debating in this Chamber legislation that literally means the difference between food and hunger for Ms. Arnold, Ms. Stewart, and millions of families in this country, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of families in my home State of Ohio like theirs.

In a nation wealthy as ours, eradicating hunger, eliminating poverty, investing in families should not be a political issue. It is not Republican versus Democrat. It is food and shelter versus Americans who aren't as fortunate as all of us in this body, as the staff, the Senators, all of us. This is a moral obligation, a duty that flows from compassion and the very reason we have been sent here as public servants.

In November of last year, families in my State of Ohio, as they did in the

State of the Presiding Officer, sent a loud and clear message that they wanted change. They demanded in no uncertain terms that the priorities championed here in Washington better reflect their own back home. Given their call for change and the unquestionable understanding of challenges facing families across the country, one must pause and reflect on what we are actually doing here. We have a responsibility to think about the priorities being debated this week, this very day as part of the farm bill.

On the one hand, we have been arguing for weeks about how many tens of millions, sometimes hundreds of millions, an industry gets out of this bill. We have been arguing over profit margins. On the other hand, we have in this legislation language that would fund food banks by an additional \$110 million each year. We have legislation that would increase food stamp funding by \$5 billion over 5 years and would help millions of new families with food assistance. We have the opportunity in this bill to validate for Ms. Arnold and Ms. Stewart and the millions of mothers like them across the country that their voices do in fact matter. These are not issues being discussed only within these walls. This is a question of principle. It is a call to action the public understands very well. The public understands how important are the issues of hunger, social justice, investing in families, at every level of income.

I applaud Ohio food banks and businesses such as First Energy and the Kroger Company for their dedication and initiative. This year First Energy and its employees, as part of their Harvest for Hunger campaign, collected the equivalent of nearly 2 million meals. This week the Kroger Company helped jump-start a Hunger is Unacceptable campaign in greater Cincinnati.

Local social service agencies in the area are pooling resources to help fight hunger more effectively. What these stories say to me is that people back home get it. They get it in Cincinnati, in Columbus, and in Cleveland. It is time that Washington gets it.

I strongly urge my colleagues to remember that budgets and bills are more than ink on paper. They are a set of priorities, and they are about our values. I strongly encourage my colleagues not to delay in passing the farm bill and to remember how many families are depending on them for us to stand up for them.

I fully expect and encourage families back home to continue watching what we do and to hold all of us accountable for our actions.

I want to say to Ms. Arnold—with a very special mention to Rhonda Stewart—that so many of us in this Chamber hear you. We are fighting for you, and we will not give up.

I yield the floor.

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