

Mr. REID. I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. CANTWELL. I ask consent to speak as if in morning business.

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

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION ACT

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I know my colleagues here want to join in on the debate that just transpired, but I wanted to take a minute to talk about Senate bill 1542, which passed last night. I know, just as people are frustrated here with everything that is going on, I think it is important to stop for a second, when something does pass and it is good policy, that we talk about it, and that is the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act.

Congress took a pretty big step last night by improving the lives of children by the passage of this legislation. It is about keeping families together. It is about rewarding government efficiency and driving down costs, and it is about giving flexibility to invest in programs that are proven to work for kids and families.

This bill is about America's children. It is about making sure that America's foster care program works for children so they can keep their families together. Too often, our Federal policies have punished States which have innovative programs, giving States money based on how many kids were still in foster care instead of rewarding success and innovation that helped transition children out of the foster care system and back with their families.

Let me tell you what has happened in Washington State. We have been implementing innovative programs to improve foster care for many years now. When Washington State noticed a disproportionate number of Native-American children being placed in foster care, our advocates took action and implemented the Washington Indian Child Welfare Act in developing strategies for strengthening tribal relationships and promoting the best interests of Native-American children.

When Washington State noticed in general how long children were staying in foster care, advocates took action, this time implementing policies to help reduce the length of stay for children in out-of-home care. As a result, the median length of stay for children in out-of-home care declined almost 100 days between 2009 and 2011. In addition,

Washington State reduced its foster care caseloads by 13.8 percent during a similar time period.

Unfortunately, instead of being rewarded for these actions, we were penalized, and that is what this legislation has helped to correct. In fact, we lost \$2.7 million during that time period. So this legislation, instead of punishing Washington State for keeping kids out of foster care, helps us ensure the kind of innovation that will help us to make sure the best programs are implemented. This allows Washington to increase its capacity to keep doing the things that keep children who have been in the foster care system from being in the foster care system the entirety of their childhood. This instead drives them, hopefully, successfully back with their families.

Our State can invest in evidence-based programs that have proven to work, and just as this legislation will help us to do, it will make sure that children don't bounce from foster home to foster home on a continuing basis. We will help to keep kids out of the care system and, when possible, place them back safely with families.

Washington State Representative Ruth Kagi, who has been a tireless advocate for this system, said it best:

Title IV-E waivers can help the State move from purchasing specific services to purchasing specific outcomes.

I thank Chairman BAUCUS and Ranking Member HATCH for their timely and innovative work on this legislation. I wish my colleagues could have been at the hearing that was held earlier this year when Senator BAUCUS asked young adults, who had been part of the foster system for their entire lives, how to change the system.

I thank the chairman for taking into consideration the specific improvements and innovations that Washington State has advocated. And I thank my colleague, Representative JIM MCDERMOTT, and the Washington State legislators who worked on this, including Partners for Our Children, the Children's Home Society of Washington, and the various social workers and advocates who, in our State, continue to try to innovate when it comes to foster care in America.

This legislation is a major step forward to promote innovation on a Federal basis and to help keep families together. In doing so, we will have the benefit of also driving more efficiency and driving down the cost. But, more importantly, we are going to be working to strengthen America's children and families by trying effectively to keep them together.

I thank the President, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

AMERICAN JOBS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I want to speak for a few moments about what has been happening all week here

in the Senate and in the House of Representatives.

First of all, this year we have seen a terrible string of natural disasters that have shut down businesses and left families homeless across America. As chair of the Agriculture Committee, I am certainly very concerned about the flooding along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and the record droughts that have devastated the livelihoods of men and women who grow our food across America.

In response to that, the Senate, on a strong bipartisan basis, responded to provide the funding for FEMA to help with communities across America, 48 States, to be able to respond and be able to do what we always do as Americans—to be able to step forward and work together and meet these kinds of natural disasters and the help that is needed.

We sent that to the House. The House decided, on the other hand, that they not only would lower the funding amount, even though we know that means multiple times now having to keep churning to work something out, but they have cut the amount. Then they added to it an effort to cut in half a public-private sector effort that is creating jobs.

I know people in Michigan and people across the country would be scratching their heads, saying, Wait a minute. Did I hear this right? We are stepping forward to help families who had their house wiped out or their business wiped out or their farm wiped out or some other horrendous challenge because of natural disasters. In order to help them, the House Republicans are saying we have to cut jobs. That makes absolutely no sense.

I would say that while Michigan was very fortunate that we were not one of the 48 States that has lost, because of weather disasters, homes or businesses or jobs or families, we have had a different kind of disaster that has been going on. It is an economic disaster, it is a jobs disaster.

I find it appalling that, on the one hand, we see strong support on the other side of the aisle to rebuild homes and businesses and roads and schools in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are not saying there, well, gosh, we need to take away an effort to fund jobs or education here at home to be able to fund what we are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. But when it comes to helping people in America, somehow we can't work together and get that done without having to pit one State which has a jobs crisis against another State which has a flood or a hurricane or a drought. I don't find that to be very American.

I think it is time to stop playing politics. When hundreds of thousands of families and businesses have been devastated by unprecedented strings of floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters, we ought to be stepping up, doing what we did in the Senate and passing a bipartisan bill to help those families, those businesses, those farms, without playing