

not have severe water damage or asbestos because the White House is not plagued by disinvestment.

President Trump does not pay rent, and he is not in danger of being priced out of his neighborhood. And yet President Trump and congressional Republicans are proposing to strip cities of their ability to create and maintain affordable housing for those who most desperately need it.

The Ryan-McConnell tax bill is a lie that is being sold to the American people as a promise, a promise that claims that everyday Americans will benefit and see more dollars in their pockets. But it is a scam; it is a shell game; and it will make richer the rich and leave everybody else behind.

The proposed tax plan eliminates funding for low-income housing tax credits, which are responsible for many affordable developments. The need for affordable housing is ever growing, and the low-income housing tax credit must be expanded, not eliminated, to keep up with demand. For New Yorkers, every dollar in their paycheck matters when it comes to being able to pay rent.

Removing the State and local tax deduction, called SALT, places an unfair double tax on State residents. States who choose to provide high-quality services through taxation will be unfairly punished. This unjust punishment will be felt mostly by those who live paycheck to paycheck.

In some neighborhoods in New York City, residents spend as much as 80 percent of their income on housing and transportation. Removing the State and local tax deduction means that families who already make tough decisions about food, rent, and other bills now have fewer dollars in their pockets to make those decisions.

For families that have saved up enough to participate in the American Dream of owning their home, they no longer will be able to use the mortgage interest tax deduction to help them finance their homes. For many hopeful families, eliminating the mortgage interest tax deduction closes the door to that opportunity.

The low-income housing tax credit, the State and local tax deduction, and the mortgage interest tax deduction are the foundation from which we can build affordable communities. We will not give in to the GOP tax scam; we will not play in a shell game; and we will not give billionaires even one more dollar. America deserves a better deal.

Madam Speaker, I close by saying that, in my home State of New York, the Empire State, and particularly in my district, for the last 75 years, it has been represented by two giants: first, by the late and great Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who made history right here in these Chambers; and for the last 46 years, by the "Lion of Lenox Avenue," Charles B. Rangel.

Underfunding of affordable housing in that district starves public housing and is compromising the health of pub-

lic housing residents. HUD's capital backlog of \$26 billion cannot be added to. We must be responsible and take hold of this challenge.

For the public health of our constituents, to preserve the American Dream, I urge my colleagues to vote and make affordable housing a priority.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. TENNEY). Members are reminded to address their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

FOOD SECURITY IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise today as the vice chair of the House Agriculture Committee and chair of the House Agriculture Nutrition Subcommittee.

We are currently working on a farm bill, and the farm bill has legislative policy that really has multiple purposes. One is to make sure that Americans have food security, they have access to affordable, high-quality, and safe food. Also, though, it is just as much about making sure that we have a vibrant, rural economy, Madam Speaker.

Within the farm bill, there is the nutrition title. Tonight, I want to spend some time talking about the nutrition title and the importance of that nutrition title. Obviously, nutrition matters. We know the health benefits from getting access to nutritional food.

Madam Speaker, there is kind of a value I grew up with growing up in a rural community. Madam Speaker, I say that one of the worst parts about growing up in a small, rural community is, quite frankly, everybody knew your business. If you did something wrong, before you got home, Mom and Dad probably already heard about it. Now, I have to say that was the worst part.

The best part about growing up in a rural community is that everybody knew your business. And when a family had a need, whether there was a crisis of any type, an emergency, neighbors stepped forward. Neighbors helped neighbors. They stepped forward, whether it was support, love, financial support, food, physical assistance, whatever that might be.

And, for me, that principle, that value of neighbor helping neighbor is really what the nutrition title of the farm bill is all about. And the most appropriate place for the nutrition title and our nutrition programs is in the farm bill because, after all, there is not a calorie that is consumed within the nutrition programs that is not raised by a farm family someplace.

So this evening, we really want to take some time and zero in on what we call D-SNAP within the nutrition title. SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Madam Speaker.

At one time, it was called food stamps. That was many years ago. That still gets tossed around. But it is really the SNAP benefits today. It is supplemental. It is assistance that comes after an individual or a family, whatever resources they put towards their own foods needs. Obviously, it is what their family can assist them with and it is what their community can assist them with, whether that is their church or another civic organization or, perhaps, a food bank.

We also have nutritional programs called TEFAP that provide food and food commodities to our food banks as well. That can be the subject of another evening to talk about.

Tonight, we want to talk about D-SNAP. Those are specific benefits that come at times of disaster.

We know that our country has been really overwhelmed with disasters. We have seen, obviously, hurricanes in the Texas and Louisiana area. We have seen hurricanes in the Florida and Georgia area. We have seen multiple hurricanes in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We have seen wildfires that have taken homes and lives, dramatic wildfires, intense wildfires, burning entire neighborhoods and communities in both California and Oregon, specifically.

So, this evening, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about those D-SNAP disaster programs. I am very proud about the programs that are authorized through the House Agriculture Committee, through the farm bill, through our work.

We are working on a farm bill right now. This next one expires in October of next year, 2018. But because of the rural economy, we feel it is very important that we do that ahead of time, and we are hoping to accomplish that soon, in the months to come. We will see how that works out.

We have got a lot of work to continue to do on it, but that is our goal. The rural farm economy, farm income, has been down by 50 percent for a number of years, so this would be a really positive thing for rural America to be able to accomplish this farm bill.

So tonight we want to talk a little bit about, specifically, food assistance for disaster relief, otherwise referred to as D-SNAP.

Madam Speaker, there is nothing more important than providing food

when people find themselves suddenly and often critically in need following a storm, an earthquake, a flood, obviously, a hurricane, a wildfire, or any other disaster emergency. It is hard enough if you have lost your home or you have lost your place of employment. You shouldn't need to worry about where your next warm meal is coming from. That is what our D-SNAP, or our food assistance for disaster relief, does.

I am very proud, as I started to say, of the Agriculture Committee and our role within oversight authorizing these programs. But I am also very appreciative of the very dedicated individuals who work at the United States Department of Agriculture and, specifically, the Food and Nutrition Service, referred to as FNS, under the leadership of the Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

Over the past several months, we have had a number of natural disasters that everyone is well aware of. They have devastated parts of our Nation, from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria to the wildfires on the West Coast. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, FNS, has worked diligently to ensure that those impacted by these disasters have enough to eat.

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Now, working in close coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA; our State partners; and volunteer organizations, FNS has not only ensured that individuals participating in our regular nutrition assistance programs continue to receive the nourishment that they need, but also that other populations affected by the disaster have access to the food.

Madam Speaker, under the authority that is provided through the farm bill, and specifically section 301 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, through USDA, we are able to provide administrative flexibilities, including waivers for program requirements in cases of Federal major disaster declarations, which we have seen so many of those in the past few months.

We were able to provide technical assistance to State leaders in impacted areas to assist them to determine what flexibilities or waivers are best suited for the stage of the disaster at hand. Requests for waivers and flexibilities are submitted to FNS by State agencies. That is where the need is determined by when those declarations are made. For example, waivers for school meal program operations are requested by the State department that oversees the school meal program. And waivers from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, as we have talked about, are requested by the SNAP State agency.

So these flexibilities and waivers in food aid programs are provided at different stages in the disaster.

In just a little bit, we are going to talk about some of the different disas-

ters we have faced in the States and how these programs that are made available through our work in the Agriculture Committee have really been there to serve our neighbors in need.

When a disaster is anticipated, an FNS best practice is to work with the State agencies and potentially impacted areas to determine what flexibilities are most needed.

Madam Speaker, some of these waivers and flexibilities, they range from early issuance of SNAP benefits; to SNAP automatic mass replacement; and extension of time to report food loss, food loss that was purchased with SNAP benefits, food that was supplemental to assist families and individuals in need; a SNAP hot foods waiver.

Normally, the food under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that is purchased, taken home, is nutritional food and prepared to be able to serve, and normally hot food purchase is not allowed.

When people have lost their homes, when they have lost those types of critical assets, and in the middle of that, being able to have that waiver to be able to go to where there is food that has been cooked, whether it is a convenience store, whether it is a fast food restaurant, although normally not a place that is approved for SNAP benefits, we recognize that may be the only warm food available, given when you are in the middle or immediately following a disaster, and so those waivers are provided.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Programs for Women, Infants, and Children, or the WIC program. FNS has the ability to grant flexibilities and substitutions in WIC to disaster-stricken States on items such as fluid milk, bread, juice, cheese, eggs, basic staples, for example, when regional demand and the supply chain disruptions are present.

Child nutrition programs. FNS allows for a number of flexibilities during disasters, such as allowing disaster-affected schools and institutions to provide meals to all children at no cost and to be reimbursed at the free reimbursement rate for a limited period of time when a geographic area is heavily devastated by a declared disaster emergency and where the normal processes of food provided in the home has been disrupted. All these things and so much more, Madam Speaker, are part of this.

We also have a disaster household distribution which is a part of the program. That is high quality, nutritious, 100 percent American-grown-and-produced food. USDA foods are distributed to food banks and other partner organizations.

In times of disaster, especially when disaster-affected populations do not have access to congregate feeding, in other words, coming together to be able to get their food, they are in isolated communities and/or grocery stores are not operating because of the disasters, a State agency may request to operate a disaster household dis-

tribution program, in which food banks and voluntary organizations utilize the household-size USDA foods, such as those offered in The Emergency Food Assistance Program, what we refer to as TEFAP, to build and distribute food boxes to families. And, of course, the Disaster SNAP that I made reference to. D-SNAP is one of many types of food assistance for disaster relief.

The D-SNAP is a streamlined version of SNAP that provides temporary—and that is important to understand—food assistance for households not currently receiving SNAP who are affected by a natural disaster. Areas with a Presidential designation of a major disaster with individual assistance are eligible to operate a D-SNAP. States have to request approval from FNS to operate a D-SNAP in such an area.

The timing of the D-SNAP varies with the unique circumstances of each disaster, but always begins after the commercial channels of food distribution have been restored so eligible families can purchase and prepare food at home.

D-SNAP programs are often paired with supplements for the ongoing caseload to bring their benefits up to a maximum amount.

Finally, of the food assistance disaster programs, the final one, just briefly, and the eighth one, is infant formula and food. USDA, through FNS, can make emergency procurements of infant formula and foods for 96 hours after a Presidential declaration and upon request by FEMA or a State agency. With these State agencies, local supplies of these products and similar items provided in FEMA's infant and toddler kits are typically utilized first before FNS receives a request for these products.

These are all examples of great programs. When American families are hit by these natural disasters to a significant level where Presidential declarations of natural disasters are declared, through the Agriculture Committee and mobilized through the United States Department of Agriculture, and the programs that we authorize under that agency, this is how neighbors help neighbors in need.

Madam Speaker, I thought I would just touch briefly on a few of the programs, some of the experiences of how American families have been assisted through these programs, starting with August 25, 2017, with Hurricane Harvey, where it struck Texas.

Madam Speaker, we are all familiar with the scenes as we watched the unparalleled, just Biblical proportions of rain, 5 feet of rain in just a number of days.

Texas was provided through this program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in 39 counties that were impacted by Hurricane Harvey. FNS also approved the State request to issue automatic supplements to ongoing SNAP households in 39 counties that

received a Presidential declaration of disaster for individual assistance. FNS approved the automatic issuance of 2 months of disaster supplement benefits.

On September 1, FNS, USDA, approved a policy to provide States with flexibility to serve Hurricane Harvey evacuees, States that had chosen to either serve evacuees through expedited SNAP rule or through the simplified program rules in the evacuee policy, people who have relocated from their homes.

Additionally, on September 1, they issued an automatic mass replacement of August SNAP benefits in 29 declared counties. These mass replacement benefits were issued to replace food that was purchased with August 2017 SNAP benefits but was all destroyed by the hurricanes, the rain, the flooding as a part of that natural disaster. That is just an example.

Additionally, Texas received a hot foods extension notice. That allowed the State's hot foods waiver request to allow recipients to purchase hot foods and hot food products prepared for immediate consumption with their benefits at authorized SNAP retailers. As I mentioned before, that is normally not a part of the SNAP program, but, given the recognition, an incredibly important part of that.

Another example of application with Hurricane Harvey in Texas, USDA, through FNS, approved Texas to operate a disaster household distribution program really to address immediate food needs. Packages containing USDA foods were distributed by local feeding organizations to over 23,000 households, beginning September 8, for up to 4 weeks.

Then there was a partnership as well, Madam Speaker, where Texas and the Salvation Army used USDA foods to prepare and serve 100,000 meals to those in need.

FNS informed Texas that it could use The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP, USDA foods to provide meals at food pantries and food kitchens to people in need who couldn't reach larger disaster feeding organizations but who were able to gather at small local organizations. Those are just a few examples in Texas.

Madam Speaker, I want to fast forward to probably a month or so later, October maybe, because disaster comes in all shapes and sizes, and some of the devastating wildfires that we had, specifically in California, also reaching into Oregon.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA). I am really pleased to be joined this evening by my good friend and colleague.

Mr. LAMALFA. Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pennsylvania, Mr. THOMPSON, for yielding. I appreciate his efforts tonight in pointing out the nuances of the SNAP program and what it means in a disaster situation, such as what we have had all

over the country in hurricanes, and even in my own backyard with the wildfires that we have been hearing about in the West in general, in my own district, where several have affected us very negatively, and adjacent areas of northern California and the wine country, indeed in southern California as well.

So the flexibility that has been needed, as we found in the SNAP programs through what is known as D-SNAP, which is Disaster and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, has been very helpful to many in northern California and even southern California counties as well.

So when the California Department of Social Services requested the D-SNAP to be put in place, the Food and Nutrition Service did, indeed, grant that in several instances, including October, and more so in northern California, but in other instances as well in this case, indeed, as Mr. THOMPSON so well explained earlier in tonight's Special Order.

Due to power outages from the fires knocking out power, we have food loss and spoilage due to those power outages, as well as other instances, and even the ability for people to buy food. Maybe their home is okay, but they wouldn't have the markets available to them in their community to buy food that they need locally. So the D-SNAP program has given the flexibility and the ability to source it and have it available after these families have suffered losses, including the waiver for some folks who don't have the ability to produce and prepare hot food, where, in that case, families can have fairly normal meals in a time of crisis that is, indeed, a comfort for them and a positive that the flexibility of the program has made available for them.

So, indeed, destroyed homes due to fire, the power outages that have extended to so many areas and for so long have, indeed, caused these crises for families here. The flexibility of this program, as Mr. THOMPSON has pointed out here tonight, has been very helpful in that time of disaster and relief that is needed, and the compassion that comes from people helping each other in these times and these instances where we have had so much volunteerism, people stepping forward to help others in times of crisis, but you need that little extra push sometimes that this program can be helpful for.

So I appreciate the FNS stepping forward and approving what the California Department of Social Services has looked at as, indeed, worthy disaster relief that has been needed in these areas.

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It wouldn't just apply to wildfires as well, where we have had so much hitting California this year, northern California especially. We had the issue of a possible flood and the crisis at Oroville Dam, when the spillway broke and 188,000 people had to be evacuated

due to great concerns about additional failure of the dam.

So the ability to have this available, should the timing be right, and the qualifications for it being deemed that type of disaster, indeed is a comfort for a community when basic needs like putting food on the table during crisis after a disaster come into play; whether it is fire, as was declared here, or it could be possible flood and evacuations, things of that nature, that make this a good part of an integral part of keeping a community fed and together.

So I appreciate Mr. THOMPSON allowing me to speak here tonight and to be able to point out how this has worked in northern California during just this last month in these horrendous wildfire situations we have seen in so many counties. I thank the gentleman for leading this tonight and for his attention to this.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's leadership on the Agriculture Committee.

Really, I think sometimes we take for granted basic essentials, such as food. Normally, these programs are for people who are, for temporary reasons or economic reasons, unemployed, underemployed. We are trying to help give people a pathway to greater opportunity through job training and those types of things.

But when disaster occurs, your life changes overnight. So I am very proud of the work that we do, of the fact that we are there for all of our neighbors in both rural and urban America; when they find themselves in a situation where they are dealing with loss of a home, or the loss of a place of employment, or delays of going to work, or schools being closed, that we really are in a position to be able—they shouldn't have to worry about that next warm meal.

Natural disasters do come in all—we just talked a little bit about the wildfires. Certainly, Oregon also is a State that has been the scene of wildfires and, specifically, received FNS, disaster and nutrition assistance in the form of child nutrition programs, not just from the flames, but from the smoke, with advisories due to smoke advisories, qualifying air quality alerts, allowing for what we call non-congregate meal service, normally, through a summer food program, basically getting food out to those families, to those kids so that they are—you don't want to be traveling through that heavy smoke.

We are all too familiar with another form of natural disaster, and that is hurricanes. We have citizens on a wonderful island, Puerto Rico, that was hit by not just one but two hurricanes in a short period of time, Hurricane Maria and Hurricane Irma.

I am joined this evening by a friend and a colleague who represents all those many United States citizens living on the island of Puerto Rico, Miss

JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I thank the gentlewoman for joining us this evening.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Puerto Rico (Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN).

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN of Puerto Rico. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman, my friend, for allowing me actually to speak about what is happening in terms of the USDA—the Department of Agriculture—and all the food programs on the island in terms of disaster, as the gentleman was explaining, how these programs work with the disaster.

As we speak, Puerto Rico's still has 60 percent of the island without power. As we speak, less than 20 percent of our island is having actual running water, problems with communications.

The first thing people will say is lack of electricity. They will say the lack of a proper home, when you have got more than 60,000 homes that just lost their roof or even are having a lot of damages.

So in that regard, the nutritional assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for disaster relief in Puerto Rico has been indispensable; it has been important. Actually, the continuous communication the Government of Puerto Rico is having with the Department of Agriculture has been the first time, I think, during a disaster in this magnitude.

We are living the 49th day after the hurricane. To make matters worse, for most of our people, the lack of power and the lack of water is just a fraction of the issues. I mean, we have still got a lot of schools that haven't returned to impart classes. So that means that you have a lot of kids in their homes without going to school, and a lot of several structural damages in the homes, businesses, communities, all around the island. The amount of flooding, roads and bridges that got serious damage or lack functionality is staggering at this time. So the nutritional assistance was a concern since before the hurricanes.

I need to say that I appreciate Secretary Perdue having a call with me and different conference calls regarding different programs. First of all, 9 of the 11 programs for disaster in the Department of Agriculture, in terms of the farmers, the territories, will never apply because we are not, in fact, allowed to apply. He made it happen. He used flexibility to allow Puerto Rico to access those programs in terms of the farmer disaster assistance, and I appreciate that.

That happens also with the USDA programs. The USDA officials have been in contact directly, not just with my office, but with the Governor of Puerto Rico, with the local officials since early on when this problem was hitting the island. As a matter of fact, I was in touch today with them regarding a lot of the problems.

I am also pleased with the inclusion of the disaster assistance for the Puer-

to Rican Nutrition Assistance Program in the second supplemental bill for the disaster relief that was approved here. However, we still need, of course, a lot of help. We still know that there is a long way to recover ahead of us.

Most of the challenges we are facing now are because of the lack of power, the lack of electricity. Our people are struggling due to not having access to their nutritional assistance benefits because there are still many stores that remain without power and they cannot process the benefits through the electronic benefits system.

If the benefits are not used, in the case of Puerto Rico, for a 60-day period, they are going to be removed from individual accounts, and then returned to the Nutrition Assistance Program.

So that is one of the issues we are still working with the Department: American citizens losing access to funds allocated for them to mitigate food necessities.

I would like to encourage the Department of Agriculture to take these difficulties into consideration and explore more avenues for remedial action, because I know nobody expected an island or a territory to be, after 49 days, without power. My people are helpless against the lack of electricity, yet they stand to suffer greatly because of it.

Additionally, the Government of Puerto Rico had to request two hot foods waivers to allow the purchase of hot foods using Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. The first one was graciously approved by the Secretary, and I hope the second one that has already been received will be also accommodated.

Saying that, I want to thank personally Secretary Perdue and all the people working with FNS, USDA, and the Department of Agriculture, who have been visiting the island, dealing with farmers, dealing with the local officials. Of course, I just request that the agency remains sensitive to the challenges that 3.4 million American citizens are facing on the island. For that, I am thankful, I am grateful.

Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman THOMPSON for allowing me to be here. I know this is not the first time that he is actually fighting for this. He has been a lone leader in that regard, and I want to join him in that effort.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I have to say it has been very impressive. In the middle of that hurricane, I know that I communicated with the gentlewoman by text, and she was what we call where I am from "hunkered down." But she has been there for the people she represents every moment since. I mean, the gentlewoman was in the middle of that, and has been there, and has been reaching out and building relationships with individuals like Secretary Perdue and the staff from the Food and Nutrition Service, with USDA.

I know we were just in a hearing—the gentlewoman and I serve together on the Natural Resources Committee—and

talked a lot about the power disruption and how that certainly impacts nutrition, but it impacts quality of life and everything. We take it for granted. We take it for granted.

So the gentlewoman's leadership to her constituents is just very impressive. They are fortunate to have her, and I am fortunate to be able to call her my friend.

I think we do have a friend in terms of Secretary Sonny Perdue—a mutual friend. He and the staff at the Department of Agriculture are really committed to serving our citizens, serving our families. They have been so proactive in these overwhelming natural disasters that have gone from coast to coast, and in the Caribbean, and just everywhere we turned around, and they were absolutely devastating.

So as someone who does serve on the Agriculture Committee, I take a lot of pride in the fact of seeing what we work on each and every day in terms of authorizing programs, to watch those get implemented and watch those really make a difference.

The gentlewoman had mentioned the hot food waiver, the first one being approved through October, November. With the power being out, I certainly would support the gentlewoman's request made to the Department of Agriculture to continue that. That is not something we normally do.

As I explained, we all know that normally, under SNAP, in particular, it is food that we purchase, and then take it home and prepare it. But if you are without electricity, that is pretty tough to do.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN of Puerto Rico. It is difficult. I just rode out the hurricane down there. We never expect to experience something like this.

So this kind of program, the disaster program, is very important not just for territories, but for States. You will never know when something like this will happen to you.

The gentleman is thanking me, but you know what? I am receiving all these opportunities and help because I count on people like him to actually help me out, reaching the agencies, doing the amendments, and the votes that are needed to approve that kind of relief bill that was here. I couldn't vote for that. Even though I represent 3.4 million American citizens, I could not vote, but the gentleman did. So this is a team effort, and there is a long way to recover. I hope it is going to end here.

Again, I thank the gentleman for all he has been doing in the committee—in both committees, actually. I know we can, as a team, work out so the people of Puerto Rico may recover soon.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, can I inquire as to how much time remains?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Pennsylvania has 19 minutes remaining.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I just want to mention—because I think we have talked

about the wildfires in California and Oregon. We have heard about the terrible—the one-two punch, actually, in Puerto Rico with Hurricanes Maria and Irma, and how these programs are stepped up.

I want to certainly touch on the other parts of our country where American citizens have been impacted as well.

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While we are talking about Hurricane Maria, I think it is very important to talk about our U.S. citizens who live on the United States Virgin Islands.

This is an area as well where we have been able to mobilize under the authority of the work that we do, and in the Agriculture Committee through USDA. For the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, we are able to receive a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as well, in the districts of St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas.

This is obviously an island that has been devastated by Hurricane Maria. It makes it very difficult to deploy resources, especially in the interior of islands, but I really appreciate how the administration proactively anticipated the disaster was going to occur and staged resources.

As a former EMT, firefighter, and rescue technician, really to be able to pre-deploy, to be able to serve those American families—they were in a very difficult situation, and including the work of the tremendous staff at the Department of Agriculture, and the food and nutrition service, and Under Secretary Perdue's leadership, to be able to serve these citizens, that is an ongoing effort.

There is no doubt about that. Numerous aspects of our food assistance for disaster relief were deployed there, and we just really appreciate the efforts.

In the southeastern United States, actually in addition to Texas and in southwestern Louisiana as well, families and individuals in Louisiana felt the impact of Hurricane Harvey. They received a waiver to allow distribution in August of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program which are food packages that were distributed in 2017, and they were provided in an August food package, and a September food package. So there was assistance under Disaster SNAP as well there. That was Hurricane Harvey.

As we have heard already about Hurricane Irma, the tremendous damage that was done impacted individuals and families in both Florida and Georgia where we saw the supplemental assistance program, or D-SNAP, that was provided to eligible households. Some of the affected counties were able to receive 2 months of benefits to meet their food needs while they settled back home following the disaster.

FNS also approved an extension of the States' hot foods waiver, as you heard about earlier. Those waivers are an important part of what we can do to

help people's lives be better immediately following and during the transition time for a temporary period of time following disasters. On September 14, FNS approved a request to begin disaster household distribution of 25 to 30 pounds of USDA food packages in those Presidentially declared disaster areas in Florida for a period of up to 4 weeks.

On September 22, several flexibilities requested by the Florida Department of Health were approved to assist schools and childcare centers, and sponsor organizations that were operating the Child Care Food Program, or CCFP, and those approvals applied to all 67 counties.

Of course, as we mentioned, that same disaster incident in the State of Georgia that was impacted has served families there, and individuals have been served by these programs. FNS approved the State's request to issue an automatic mass replacement of 45 percent of the September 2017 SNAP benefits because of food that was damaged, lost, contaminated, and needed to be replaced in 71 counties in Georgia that were destroyed due to the disaster.

FNS approved the State's request to extend the time period households had to report food losses through individual affidavits, giving that flexibility as a part of the process as well, as well as waivers applied to schools and residential care institutions that operated under the nutritional assistance programs.

Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the examples. We have heard a lot about disasters. We continue to hear about them. We have great first responders. We have resources, our military, our National Guard. All kinds of contractual resources have been deployed by the Federal Government, State governments, and territorial governments. Among those are these nutrition programs.

As we prepare to reauthorize the farm bill and to do that here, hopefully, by the end of this year, or the very beginning of next year, I think it is important to take the time to really understand what a difference these nutritional programs can make in the lives of average-day Americans who are facing extraordinary challenges and events in their life.

Again, the nutrition programs are normally about serving those who find themselves temporarily in economically challenging situations with the loss of employment, or underemployment, frequently because of no fault of their own. And this supplemental nutrition assistance is to help them get by. We are also trying to work to make sure we provide some pathways to greater opportunity for those who perhaps would benefit from what I like to call skills-based education to help them get a better job and more resources for the family, to be able to take care of these needs independently on their own.

But there are individuals who find themselves chronically in need, perhaps, because of a significant disability, who need to be able to know that those programs are there, and to rely on them. Then there is another group that we have talked about this evening, those who wake up one morning or in the middle of the night and find that their lives have changed dramatically, at least for the time being, because of national disasters.

Madam Chair, I really appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on these issues, and I was very pleased to be joined by a couple of my colleagues this evening.

Once again, under general leave, I am going to be submitting some comments by the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, MIKE CONAWAY, who has done a great job of leading the Agriculture Committee, as well as JIM MCGOVERN, who is a good friend and very passionate about nutrition programs.

He has a long record of service in this area, and he and I lead—he is the ranking member—the Nutrition Subcommittee.

Madam Chair, I am grateful for the opportunity to be here and to raise these issues this evening, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CONAWAY. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to acknowledge the response of our communities and Federal agencies to the recent hurricanes and wildfires. I would like to first offer my thoughts and prayers to families affected by these tragedies.

The USDA and FNS play a vital role in providing supplemental nutrition assistance when disasters occur by coordinating with State, local, and voluntary organizations. Nothing is more important than providing food when people find themselves suddenly, and often critically, in need following disaster-related emergencies.

FNS has worked tirelessly to provide nutrition assistance to those affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, as well as the Western Wildfires. Our fellow citizens in Texas, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, California, and Oregon have received assistance including automatic mass replacement of benefits, D-SNAP, free school meals, and waivers, ultimately ensuring people have enough to eat in their time of need.

As Secretary Perdue has said, each disaster situation is unique. The USDA and FNS have demonstrated their ability to respond to each of these unique situations in a timely and effective way.

The challenges facing our communities ravaged by hurricanes and wildfires are unprecedented. Getting food on the table in a timely manner should not be an additional challenge. I want to recognize the fortitude of our fellow citizens as they come together to rebuild after such devastation as well as acknowledge the USDA's diligence in addressing the nutrition-related needs of our fellow citizens.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Madam Speaker, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—

known as SNAP—provides modest food assistance benefits to families in need. The program helps to alleviate hunger, reduce poverty, and improve nutrition across our country on an ongoing basis.

SNAP is also designed to help families put food on the table when disaster strikes. In response to recent hurricanes, fires, floods, and storms, officials at the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) have worked with other federal and state emergency response agencies to ensure those impacted by disasters have access to food.

Flexibilities in SNAP, for example, allow states to issue SNAP benefits early to ensure recipients can stock up on food before a disaster hits.

In many cases, SNAP recipients impacted by disaster and power outages are able to request additional benefits to replace food they lost, and in certain circumstances, are able to use their SNAP benefits to purchase hot foods if they lost power and are unable to cook.

Disaster SNAP, known as D-SNAP, is a key feature of the program that provides nutrition assistance benefits to families in major disaster areas who aren't currently receiving benefits. Importantly, D-SNAP also provides families currently enrolled in SNAP with supplemental benefits to help them get by in the wake of disaster.

In addition to SNAP, other federal anti-hunger safety net programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), child nutrition programs, and Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) come to the aid of those recovering from disaster.

For example, schools in areas affected by disaster can provide meals to all kids at no charge and can be more flexible in where and when they serve meals.

DHD is another program to allow food banks and other organizations to distribute emergency food boxes filled with nutritious food to people that don't have access to feeding sites or grocery stores in the aftermath of disaster.

Madam Speaker, when disasters hit the United States—and its territories—it is imperative that our government effectively and efficiently helps those impacted by these terrible tragedies.

SNAP and our other nutrition programs are a key component of disaster response efforts, providing food to families in need. In the aftermath of recent tragedies that devastated Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, California, and Oregon, USDA was able to respond.

I'd like to thank my friend and colleague on the Agriculture Committee, the Chairman of the Nutrition Subcommittee, Mr. GT THOMPSON, for raising awareness about nutrition assistance in times of disaster.

I encourage all of my colleagues to join us in recognizing how powerful and effective SNAP and other nutrition programs are in responding to natural disasters. We must work to protect these programs from cuts or structural changes that threaten the ability of these programs to help families in need.

VETERANS DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of Jan-

uary 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Madam Speaker, I recently toured the newly renovated United States Capitol dome right nearby and, of course, was well aware it contains a striking fresco at the top. The title of that fresco is The Apotheosis of Washington, a bit of a peculiar image for our time, because it shows a stern, purple-clad George Washington exalted in the heavens.

Now, on his right is the Goddess of Liberty symbolizing emancipation; and on his left, the Goddess Victoria, symbolizing victory. He is surrounded by 13 maidens representing the Thirteen Original Colonies; however, there is a twist. The backs of several of the maidens are turned to Washington, and those represent the colonies of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia as they had seceded from the Union prior to the work beginning the fresco in 1863.

Now, Madam Speaker, the imagery continues, and around the rest of the dome are six allegorical scenes that do really project the defining ideas of America at that time. They are: war, science, marine life, commerce, mechanics, and agriculture. Now, these are perhaps old-fashioned categories to the modern mind, but then they did convey an optimism about the frontier, economic progress, and the potential of what our new Nation might be able to achieve.

Although, Madam Speaker, I had seen these frescos before, something struck me differently this time. These scenes really do grasp an incomplete ideal. The Apotheosis of Washington shows a reflective and confident America, but what is missing is a fuller understanding of the nature of community, individual dignity, and freedom.

The idea of progress is narrowly defined, and that narrow definition is actually still with us today, many times as it informs our debate here. We only tend to value things that we can actually measure—things like production, technology, and military victory—and they still rally us, and they are important.

But, as important as these things are, there is more to life; the more we have grown economically, the more we have grown technologically, the more our Nation groans. We have to be honest, and we have to ask ourselves: Why?

America is a far more complicated country than it was in Washington's time. It is not only due to our size and wealth and amazingly diverse population, but it is also due to rapidly advancing technology, a 24/7 news media cycle, and a highly competitive global marketplace that has made life more frenetic, more difficult, and, in some cases, much more alienating.

Today, there is widespread anxiety in our Nation over economic inequality, declining opportunity, and the concentration of both wealth and power,

as well as a new force that is expressing a loss of unity and community, and then combine that with this deep search for a sense of solidarity.

Madam Speaker, while Congress spends much of its time debating numbers, financing, and budgets, a vision for America in its fullest sense goes beyond just material dimensions. Our economic vitality must not only be measured in terms of efficiency and growth, but also in how well we advance the cause of human flourishing.

In spite of all of these reflective comments, this Friday, our Nation will actually pause, and we will pause for a very important reason: it is Veterans Day, and we will celebrate that tradition. So if you are starting to feel overwhelmed by our Nation's struggles, just talk to a veteran.

If you see these policy battles here as impossible to resolve, talk to a vet.

If you really do want to reconnect with the ties that bind us, speak to a veteran.

Madam Speaker, as we are painfully aware, it is not easy to make progress in Congress. Nevertheless, there are times when both parties and the administration come together for great good, and actions for veterans represent a unique and proper American opportunity to support the men and women who have served our country. So as we approach Veterans Day and consider how to celebrate this gift of being an American, if we need a reminder, just ask a vet.

□ 1930

Now, back to history for a moment, Madam Speaker.

We rightly mark our independence from the British as the beginning of a new nation, a new experiment in government based in the ideals of freedom. However, freedom most properly expressed is the freedom to do what we ought.

Unlinked to responsibility, to one another, and to higher ideals, freedom can become a meaningless wandering and a search for purpose; and progress, no matter how grand it is, is never an end in itself. Persons who are disconnected from one another, an economy that is uncaring, technology ever accelerating, these are dynamics that can actually be both beneficial, but also leave people behind. Independence from tyranny also means interdependence within community.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Capitol dome is over 150 years old. Until recently, chunks of iron—in fact, I saw one; it was nearly this big—were just falling off, and water was seeping through cracks. But now it is made whole again. The seams are repaired, and there is new, original-like glass and a fresh layer of protective coating. Why? Because we chose to do it. We didn't let it fall into ruin. We didn't lament its potential collapse. We chose to act.

So, Madam Speaker, if we cling to her ideals, this gift of America allows