the first time in the years we have worked together—both with me as chair and now with him as chair—that we have not come to the floor united. It is not for lack of trying. We have been working very hard, and there are differences, but I believe that if we have the opportunity to keep working, we will be able to get to that spot where we can come together.

As I urge colleagues to oppose this proposal and moving forward on cloture without having an agreement, I also commit to continue working to get there because we have to take action to solve this problem and it has to be done in a bipartisan way. That is how we get things done, and I am committed to continuing to work with our chairman and with Members on both sides of the aisle so we can do that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise this morning to discuss an issue that is pretty near and dear to my heart and I think to the hearts of many throughout the State of Alaska, and that is—I will call it an aberration, an aberration in the fish world. What I am talking about is genetically engineered salmon, GE salmon.

We just heard from the ranking member on the Senate Committee on Agriculture. I appreciate the work she has done, along with the Senator from Kansas, to try to forge a path forward as it relates to GMO, but when we are talking about genetically engineered salmon, let me make it very clear that we are talking about two very distinct and different issues here. This is separate from the larger GMO debate.

Genetically engineered animals are not crops, and GE salmon is a genetically engineered animal. This is something that is entirely new. This is a new species. This is a new species that will potentially be introduced into our markets, into our homes, and quite possibly, contrary to what any environmental analysis claims, enters into our ecosystem.

When we are talking about the GMO, the broader GMO debate here on the floor, keep in mind that when I stand up, when the other Senator from Alaska stands up, when Alaskans stand up to talk about genetically engineered salmon, we are talking about an entirely different issue.

I get pretty wound up about this issue. I just came from a meeting of about 20 young Alaskans from around the State.

I said: I am sorry, I have to leave because I have to go to the floor to speak to this issue that is so important to us in Alaska. Do you all know what genetically engineered salmon is?

They said: Yeah. It is kind of that fake fish.

It is Frankenfish, is what we call it because it is so unnatural. It is so unnatural that it is something that, as Alaskans, we need to stand up and defend against.

I grew up in the State of Alaska. I was born there. I know well that escaping from pens occurs in hatcheries, and it can occur in facilities where fish are grown. I also well know the immense value of our fisheries and the potential for havoc that something like this Frankenfish could wreak upon our wild sustainable stocks.

I am standing here this morning saying that I will not be supporting cloture on this bill, as it is an issue which is too important to so many and has not yet been adequately addressed. I have attempted to work with the chairman and the committee to offer sensible and what we believe are reasonable fixes, but there is no solution as of yet.

I am standing today demanding, asking that the voices of Alaskans, who have stood with me in solidarity on this issue, be heard because we will not accept that genetically engineered salmon or Frankenfish—whatever it is you want to call it—we will not accept that it will be allowed to be sold without clear labeling because I don't want to make any mistakes; I don't want to find that what I have served my family is a genetically engineered fish, and I use ''fish'' lightly.

We talk about Frankenfish and some people kind of snicker nervously, but it is not a joke to Alaskans. This new species could pose a serious threat to the livelihoods of Alaskan fishermen, and I will stand to support the livelihood of Alaskan fishermen. Alaska's fisheries are world-renowned for their high quality and for their sustainability. The Alaska seafood industry supports more than 63,000 direct jobs and contributes over $4.6 billion to the State's economy. Nearly one in seven Alaskans is employed in the commercial seafood industry.

That is how my boys put themselves through college—working in the commercial fishing industry. We know about fish. For generations, my family has been involved in one way, shape, or form with the fishing business.

Salmon is a major part of Alaska's seafood economy, and commercial fishermen around the State harvested more than 265 million salmon this past season, including chinook, sockeye, coho, chum, pinks—all wild.

As we all know, wild salmon is loaded with all of the good things in it that God has placed there: tremendous health benefits, lean protein, source of omega-3s, B–6, B–12, Niacin—everything good, all in that natural wild package.

More than 1.5 million people wrote to the FDA opposing approval of genetically engineered salmon. So you have a groundswell of support around the country—this is not just from Alaskans weighing in. People are saying: No, we don't think this should be approved.

The FDA went ahead anyway. Then you have a growing number of grocery stores—Safeway, Kroger, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, and Target—that have all announced they are not going to sell this. They are not going to sell this genetically engineered species in their stores.

Yet, despite this immense opposition, in November of last year, the FDA approved AquaBounty Technologies' application for its genetically engineered AquAdvantage salmon. So for those of you who are not fully informed on what this genetically engineered fish is—how it comes about—GE salmon start from a transgenic Atlantic salmon egg. This is an ocean pout. It is a type of an eel. As you can see, it doesn't look anything like a salmon, even if you don't know your salmon very well. This is a bottom-dwelling ocean pout eel.

They take a slice of DNA from this, a slice of DNA from a magnificent Chinook salmon, and splice it into an Atlantic salmon egg. That egg is meant to produce a fish that will grow to full size twice as fast as a normal Atlantic salmon. So this is the push here—to push Mother Nature, which creates a perfectly beautiful fabulous salmon, and to take a slice of DNA here and a slice of DNA there and put it in an Atlantic salmon, which is a farmed fish, and grow it so that it grows twice as fast as a normal fish, but growing it in penned condition, theoretically, so that there is no way for escape. But are we guaranteed that there is no way for escape? I don't know. Show me that.

But what we have here, I think, is a fair question as to whether or not this GE salmon can even be called a salmon. So the FDA signed off on this last November. But they made no mandatory labeling requirement. Instead, they said: Labels can be voluntary. So, in other words, if you want to say that this piece of fish that is in front of you in the grocery store is genetically engineered—or not real—you can voluntarily put that on your label. Nobody is going to do that. Nobody is going to voluntarily say this is genetically engineered.

So what we have done—what I have done—is to fight to secure a mandatory labeling requirement both before approval of AquaBounty's application and since its approval. So we have been working hard on this issue. We have made some significant headway. But what we are dealing with on the floor right now—this legislation—would wipe that work clean, instead of using legislative tools at our disposal to effectively and precisely amend this legislation in order to address the issue of GE salmon.

So what we did is that we got some language in the Omnibus appropriations bill that requires the FDA not to allow the introduction of any food that contains GE salmon until it publishes final labeling guidelines that inform consumers of that content. So what this did is that this kind of forced the FDA to issue an import alert, which effectively bans all imports of genetically engineered salmon for 1 year.

But it also directs the FDA to spend funds—significant funds—of no less than $150,000 to develop labeling guidelines and to implement a program to

disclose to consumers whether salmon offered for sale to consumers is genetically engineered.

Again, what we want to be able to do is to let consumers know whether this fish is genetically engineered or not. So we thought that was a pretty clear labeling mandate to the FDA. But the FDA then later came back to us and said they felt that there was still clarifying legislation that we needed to do. So I have worked with Senator SULLIVAN, my colleague from Alaska, as well as Senators CANTWELL, MERKLEY, and HEINRICH, and we introduced S. 738, which is the Genetically Engineered Salmon Risk Reduction Act.

We also introduced a separate piece of legislation to respond to the FDA's November approval. We introduced S. 2640, the Genetically Engineered Salmon Labeling Act. What that bill would do is kind of to build on last year's omnibus provisions and would require labeling of genetically engineered salmon through language that I received through technical assistance working with the FDA on this.

Additionally, we would mandate a third-party scientific review of the FDA's environmental assessment of AquAdvantage salmon and the effects that these GE salmon would have on wild stocks and ecosystems, which, in my opinion—and I think, in the opinion of many others—were insufficiently addressed during the FDA's environmental assessment.

So we have been working with the FDA on this, to develop this language to mandate labeling. The FDA has been cooperative at this point working on this issue. That really is a significant step forward.

But it required me to do something that maybe others are perhaps a little more active on—to place a hold on a nominee. I placed a hold on the FDA Commissioner, Dr. Robert Califf. This is not something that I do lightly. I have not placed a hold on a nominee before. I don't take this action lightly. But it was necessary. It was necessary to bring to the attention of the FDA the significance of this issue and the seriousness of what we were dealing with.

So we got FDA to the table. We have been working with them. They have been listening. They have been helpful. We are so close to resolving this. Now we are on the floor with GMO legislation. Again, as I said at the outset, GMO is different than what we are dealing with in this genetically engineered species, a new species designed for human consumption here.

My concern is that with the GMO bill before us now, it really does threaten the good progress we have made at this point in time. It is not just the progress that the Alaska delegation made but really the work of so many Alaskans, the bipartisan hard-working efforts of so many around the country who share the same concerns.

I think we have offered some pretty sensible solutions. I will continue to offer them. I will continue my efforts to work with the chairman, for whom I have great respect. Know that, while it is not opposition to the overall bill or its underpinnings, where my concern remains is mistakenly allowing genetically engineered salmon into our homes, mislabeled as salmon.

This is something that we will continue to raise awareness on and raise the issue until we have finally and fully resolved it.

IDITAROD SLED DOG RACE

Mr. President, if I still have a few minutes more this morning, I would like to switch topics and speak about the last great race—the last great race in Alaska and really around the world, which is the Iditarod sled dog race, a 1,049-mile race from south central Alaska to Nome, AK, where man-and-dog teams are up against Mother Nature, improbably one of the most incredible human and animal endeavors that are out there.

Yesterday, we saw the conclusion. We greeted the front runner to the 44th Iditarod sled dog race. So for 44 years now, it is an amazing race from Willow to Nome. Again, when you think about man and dog out on the ice, out in the raw wilderness for 1,000 miles, this race has been described as the equivalent of an attempt at Mount Everest.

When you think about all that is Alaska and the open spaces, the independent people, and just man against nature or woman against nature, it is really the Iditarod that epitomizes so much of it. It demands not only the most out of our athletes but mental conditioning as well. It requires exceptional endurance, courage, and sound judgment as you navigate these amazing places. But it is not just the men or women who are the physical athletes. It is not just their judgment that guides this race. It is that of the teams—the dogs themselves.

When you think about the amazing teamwork that goes on between a musher and his or her animals—the communication and the will to go 1,000-plus miles in extraordinary conditions—it really is something that just stirs the greatest imagination. We have had Iditarods where teams have literally buried into the wind coming at them at 50 miles an hour and 30 below, in the dark, attacked by moose on the trail, losing the trail, with accidents, disasters.

I was going to say it is like a reality TV show. Only it is not a reality TV show. It is what Alaskans and many around the world engage in. The mushers themselves are remarkable. I could stand here on the floor and talk all morning about them, but I won't.

I will highlight just a few of them. DeeDee Jonrowe, is a longtime friend of mine. She ran her 34th Iditarod this year—talk about bravery and perseverance. This is a woman who the year before last lost her father. This summer she and her husband lost everything they owned in a wildfire out in Willow, AK. The only thing that was saved were her dogs.

But she lost her sleds, her harnesses, her home, her everything. Then, just shortly after, she lost her mother. Her comment to me was this: I am going to go back on the trail so that I can just focus. That is one tough woman.

Brent Sass is a guy who captured the lead for much of the race. He is one of these guys who came to Alaska to be a homesteader, a wilderness guy. He was champion of the Yukon Quest. He rescued mushers along the way—an amazing guy. He was actually in front position last year and was disqualified because he had an iPod and was listening to music.

Along the trail, there are no electronic devices. There are pretty tough rules in the Iditarod. Can you imagine being out on a 1,000-mile trail with nobody else, and no device, no electronics for you?

Jeff King is an amazing guy, whose grit and determination has been at the forefront of this race and so many others—a multiple winner. But he was involved with a horribly tragic accident when a snow machiner, a drunk individual, literally attacked his team, killed one of his dogs and injured a couple of others.

It was extraordinarily difficult to handle that challenge—the emotion of losing a dog but also just the real tragedy and calamity of an accident like that. Jeff has finished the race in the top 10, which is remarkable.

Another remarkable feat, though, is Aly Zirkle, who finished third, and was also subject to an extreme scare by this same snow machiner—a horribly tragic side to this year's Iditarod. But there was the fact that Aly, one tough lady, came in third and persevered all the way, just getting her head into the game.

There are so many stories about these amazing men and women, but the winner of this year's Iditarod is a young man named Dallas Seavey, 29 years old. He crossed the finish line into Nome at 9:30 p.m. last night. Dallas finished in 8 days 11 hours 20 minutes 16 seconds. This is his fourth overall win, and his third consecutive win. He is only one victory away from matching the ''king'' of the Iditarod, five-time champion Rick Swenson.

Guess who was No. 2 in the Iditarod, trailing Dallas by about 45 minutes. It was his dad. Father and son finished No. 1 and No. 2 in the Iditarod. What other sport can you think of where you have a father and son competing against one another and coming in first and second? You have to go back a ways to come up with an answer to that. It was absolutely an amazing story and Alaskans watched it play out.

I had an opportunity to visit with the father of Mitch Seavey and the grandfather of Dallas Seavey. I asked: Dan, who do you predict is going to win the Iditarod this year? His response was: I don't care as long as it is a Seavey. He was right and certainly got his wish. Alaskans are proud of the men and