

NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany S. 764, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany S. 764, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the House amendment to the bill with McConnell (for Roberts) amendment No. 3450 (to the House amendment to the bill), in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell motion to refer the bill to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11:45 a.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask unanimous consent that the time be charged equally.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment that we have not yet been able to come to an agreement on the issue of GMO labeling. Senator ROBERTS and I have a long history of friendship and of working together. We have both worked very hard to come to an agreement on an extremely difficult and emotional issue. I thank him for his continual work, and I am forever the optimist that we will get there, even though we are not there yet. We have continued to work, and my team and I have continued to work, to find common ground, all the way until very late last night. If we at this point do not proceed but can have some more time, I believe it is possible for us to come together in a bipartisan solution.

While this debate has been difficult, there are some important areas where Senator ROBERTS and I agree. For instance, Senator ROBERTS and I agree that the science has shown us that biotechnology is safe.

In fact, leading health organizations like the American Medical Association, the National Academy of Sciences, the FDA, and the World Health Organization all say there is no evidence that GMOs aren't safe. We agree that biotechnology is an important tool for farmers and ranchers, particularly as we tackle the challenges of climate change—which, by the way, science also tells us is real. I believe in science,

and I would love if we would all come together around the science on both of these issues.

We have to tackle the need to feed a growing, hungry world. We agree that a 50-State patchwork of labeling laws is not a workable long-term solution. In fact, I don't know any Member on any side of this issue in the Senate who doesn't agree with that, that we have to have a national approach, not 50 different States. But we also know, as we have frequently debated States' rights, the importance of States making decisions, that when we preempt States, whether it is on fuel efficiency standards for automobiles or whether it is on food labeling, the approach has always been to go from 50 different States doing 50 different things to having a national standard and a national approach. As it was with CAFE standards, in which I was very involved, it is important that it work from an industry standpoint. I know it can be done, and it is our job to get to that point.

We also recognize, though, that a growing number of American consumers want to know more about the food they eat, and they have the right to know. They have the right to know what is in their food.

I was very proud of the fact that we came together on the last farm bill to recognize all parts of agriculture. The fastest growing part of agriculture is the organic sector. We gave more opportunities to support the organic sector, the local food movement.

People should have choices in deciding what food they eat, how it is grown, how it is processed, and that is something we have said in national policy that we support through our agricultural policies. Unfortunately, the Senate is poised to vote on a bill that I do not support, that does not fully answer this demand from consumers. Consumers want information about the food they eat, it is as simple as that. In fact, the bill continues the status quo on providing information to consumers. It lists a number of things, many of which are already being done, 1-800 numbers and so on. Look at the back of the pack; it lists things, but they are things that are already being done—not all but many, enough—and then says: We will keep the status quo nationally, but we will preempt the States and citizens around the country from taking individual action. I don't support that. That is not good enough. It doesn't reflect what we do when we are talking about Federal policy. That is one reason I think the approach put forward in the bill is the wrong path.

Unfortunately, we have seen a lot of emotion around this issue on both sides—a lot of emotion. Frankly, there is a lot of confusion about GMOs and their safety, which is why I think this approach is the wrong approach. We should be telling the story, as should farmers, of biotechnology and the importance that it plays in our food production and in food security. We should not be taking action that further ap-

pears to stop consumers from getting the information they want and feeds into the idea that there is something wrong, that there is a reason to hide, because there is not. We should embrace this opportunity to share with the public what is in our food, talk about it, why we use these crops, why they are deemed safe.

That is why, during the last several months of negotiations with Chairman ROBERTS, I offered several proposals that would shed light on this issue and do it in a way that is eminently workable for those involved in the food industry. While those proposals were not ultimately accepted, I still believe we need and can achieve a policy that creates a uniform national system of disclosure for the use of GMO ingredients and do it in a way that has common sense and works for everybody. The national disclosure system needs to provide real options for disclosing information about GMOs that work for both consumers and food companies.

I believe we must create a system that provides certainty as well to our food companies and all of our companies—national, organic, traditional companies. Everyone knows that a 50-State system with 50 different definitions, 50 different laws, and 50 different ways to do packaging doesn't work, so we all have a need to come together and to fix this. I also believe that a system must work for all companies—very small companies, medium-sized companies, and large companies as well.

I believe we must not harm the important work being done by our organic producers. Again, we made great strides in the farm bill, and we need to keep the choices that are in the marketplace now available to consumers and not pass something that will infringe on any of the choices consumers have.

I am disappointed that we have not yet been able to come to a clear consensus on the issue of GMO labeling. I know this issue is contentious. As I said, it is very emotional on all sides. As far as I am concerned, it is time for us to come together on a thoughtful, commonsense approach that is best for consumers, for farmers, for families, and for our country.

We have the most successful agricultural system, food economy in the world. We are the envy of the world. We want to make sure that whatever we do, we maintain that position. But part of who we are in America is a country that believes in people's right to know information and be able to make their own individual choices. I believe there is a way to do that, to make sure we continue to have the strongest, most vibrant, most successful and robust agricultural economy and food economy in the world—we are literally feeding the world—and at the same time be able to provide basic information that American consumers are asking to have provided.

I will not be supporting Senator ROBERTS' amendment. I think this may be

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 escap-

ing 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 ge-

netically 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 AquaAdvantage 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