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Congressional
Record
May 25, 1958

REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD

ON

H.R. 4023 and S. 1491

Eighty-third Congress

Mr. President, I rise to protest as strongly as I can against H.R. 4023 and S. 1491.

These measures, in my opinion, constitute a raid by certain private interests on the National Forests and, if successful, will lay the groundwork for further attempts to despoil the National Parks, federal wild-life refuges, and other public lands.

Anyone reading these measures can see that what they actually do would be to make a vested right of grazing privileges under the authority of the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture. Under this vested right ranchers could sell or give their grazing privileges to people of their own choosing and the Secretary of Agriculture would be required to accede to it.

Under these measures the public interest in our forests would be subordinated and the grazing privilege would be made paramount over timber production and watershed protection.

These bills will not, as they state, provide for the "improvement and development" of the public lands. These bills are deliberately designed to protect the holders of grazing permits and not the people -- all the people -- to whom the public domain belongs.

Under sections 6 and 7, the Secretary of Agriculture would be required, wherever he permits grazing, to grant continuing grazing privileges to present permit holders and successors of their own choosing. In other words the grazing permit holder and not the Secretary would be the one who would determine who would get all permits in the future.

Section 6 would also prevent the Secretary from making any change in present grazing allotment boundaries or the kind of livestock permitted, and Section 7 would also keep him from decreasing the privilege as to the number or kind of stock, or changing allotment boundaries, for any purpose whatever, when a privilege passes to a successor.

There are other dangerous elements to these measures, but I believe I have pointed out enough of the difficulties to convince any reasonable minded person of the threat to the public welfare these proposals contain. I sincerely hope that these bills will be killed in committee, and I hope also that Secretary of Agriculture Benson will make his views known. He has been strangely silent. By his silence he has lent credence to the belief that he has adopted a "hands off" policy which, if true, augurs ill for the Forest Service which he heads. However, the only official comment up until this morning has been by a representative of the Department of the Interior. I hardly need to tell you, that was an endorsement of this questionable proposal. Much to the pleasure of the livestock industry lobbyists who have been swarming over this town during the past two weeks, they have it as an open secret that the Secretary of Agriculture and his Forest Service have been placed behind a curtain of some sort on this subject. As a result, no word has come from them about it, although both the House and Senate hearings on these bills will probably close soon.

I call upon Secretary Benson to stand up and be counted on this controversial measure and to let the public and the Congress know whether he is on the side of the people or the special interests.

I also call upon Secretary of the Interior McKay to make his views known to the proper committees and to the people of the country as well. This issue is so important and so far reaching in its possible consequences that it is imperative that the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior come from behind the curtain and face up to this issue immediately.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent at this point in my remarks that I may include a summary of these bills, telegrams and letters I have received from Montana about this proposed legislation.