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Comments on the Administration's Farm Program

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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January 1958

Senator Mike Mansfield (D. Montana) Comments On The Administration's

Farm Program

The President has sent to Congress a message on agriculture and in the message he recommends a continuation of Public Law 480, as well as an extension of the wool act. I am in favor of both proposals, because I believe they represent sound judgment.

I understand the President also suggests that we take a look at the soil bank program. I believe that is long overdue.

However, if my understanding is correct, the President also advocates a change in the price support structure for the basic commodities, and that he advocates legislation which would allow a leeway in price supports for the six basic commodities; ranging from 60 to 90 percent of parity.

In my opinion, Mr. President, if such legislation is enacted it will mean that parity will end up at 60 percent. The most recent indication of what the administration is doing in the field of farm props is the action taken recently with relation to dairy products.

The Department of Agriculture has announced that at some time in the near future - I believe on April 1 - the price supports on dairy products will drop to 75 percent. I believe that recommendation goes entirely too far.

I would call to the attention of the administration that over the past 5 years or so, 600,000 small farm families have left their farms. I would further point out to the administration that at the present time, based on figures furnished by its own Commodity Credit Corporation, 1,400,000 farm families earn less than \$1,000 a year. For the past 6 years the income of farmers has been declining, while the costs of the farmers have been rising steadily. Alone, over this period, this segment of our economy has been caught in this price-cost squeeze.

I sincerely hope that Congress will not be in accord with the recommendation in the recent message by the President of the United States for a lowering of price supports to as low as 60 percent. If I had my way, the lowest price support, insofar as the 6 basic commodities are concerned, would be 90 percent. I believe farmers would be able to live within that particular orbit. However, if price supports are reduced to 60 percent, then we can expect more and more small farmers to be forced off the land, and more and more corporate farming to come into being.

(over)

In December of last year I contacted the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Allen J. Ellender and stated at that time that "there is a great need for revisions in our Farm Program. The Administration's flexible farm-price policies and the soil bank program are not at all desirable and they have not fulfilled their purpose. Farm prices continue to drop and they are sharing less and less in the Nation's wealth.

"The farmers have been repeatedly promised that low farm prices would trim farm production and move more farm products into export markets and to the tables of consumers. These things have not helped. Low farm prices have penalized farmers and benefited the middleman . . . at the expense of the farmer."

I urged the Chairman to schedule hearings at an early date to review farm policies and new legislation which will revitalize our Farm Program.

Chairman Ellender has assured me that he shares my concern and expresses his hope that his Committee can expedite the drafting of general farm legislation.