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Congressional Record S. 18191-2 - Conference Report on Farm Bill

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
CONFERENCE REPORT ON FARM BILL

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on October 14, the last day the Senate was in session, the Senate was in the process of selecting, in answer to questions raised by various Members on both sides of the aisle, I gave assurances that the conference report on the farm bill would be taken up the day the Senate reconvened. I made those assurances in good faith, fully expecting that that would be the case.

Since that time, a number of events have occurred, not the least of which is the absence of the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senator Mansfield, due to the illness of his wife. Under his original schedule he was due to arrive in Washington yesterday. His original schedule was changed, however, through no fault of his own and he is now expected back later this week.

Therefore, with the concurrence of the Senate, I would like to be forgiven for the good assurances I made. I did not foresee some of the events that have made it impossible to have the Agriculture conference report pending as the very first item of business. Out of deference and courtesy to the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, I would like to suggest that the Senate consider taking up the conference report upon his return, which I understand will be Wednesday or Thursday, regrettfully making a request of this sort in view of the positive statement concerning the scheduling of this matter I made on October 14. However, as sometimes happens, circumstances do develop, and in this instance they have colored the picture a little bit differently.

As most of us know, the leadership does not have it totally within its power—and this applies to both leaders—to call up a conference report. Conference reports are privileged matters and under the rules of the Senate, it is the leadership that will make the decision as to whether or not to bring it up. It is the leadership that will make the decision as to when to bring it up. It is the leadership that will make the decision as to whether or not to bring it up. It is the leadership that will make the decision as to whether or not to bring it up.

Mr. MANSFIELD. The Senator is correct.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, it is my understanding that the Senator from Louisiana does return this matter will be the first order of business.

Mr. MANSFIELD. The Senator is correct. It is the order of business.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, the Senate will not consider the conference report at this time as much as the Senator from Montana and the Senator from Kansas would like to dispose of it today.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I appreciate the understanding remarks of the distinguished Senator from Kansas.

The VICE PRESIDENT. Without objection, it is so ordered.

There being no objection, the excerpts were ordered to be printed in The Record, as follows:

THE FARM BILL

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I take this time to ask a question about the conference report on the farm bill. As Senators know, there was action yesterday about action on the conference report. The Senator from Kansas is still hopeful—not very hopeful. I think that there may be some action yet today on it, but I take this opportunity to ask a question of the distinguished Senator from Montana because I have read with great interest a statement attributed to the majority leader that it will not be up on the Senate floor on November 16, and also there was some assurance from the majority leader that, without a doubt, the Senate would approve the conference report.

I ask the question now, not in any partisan way, of the Senator from Montana, who comes from a winter wheat producing State because to his State and to my State of Kansas, winter wheat is important. In the history of this Congress, the winter wheat States, this matter is highly important. In fact, I have stated my hope to the Secretary of Agriculture that perhaps, on the floor, we will have some assurance that the conference report will be considered as soon as possible or on November 16, the day that we return, and passed as soon as possible thereafter.

May I say that I have no hesitation whatever in making this statement. There is no doubt but that the Senate will overwhelmingly approve the conference report. I have been assured by the distinguished Senator from Kansas that the President will sign the extension resolution having to do with the wheat referendum, very likely today.

So, with that statement, I give to the Senator from Kansas an answer long drawn out, but I hope explicit enough and definite enough to show where the Senator from Montana stands, the position he finds himself in, and what he proposes to do as a result of it.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Yes.

Mr. DOLE. Because even though in many cases, and I assume in Montana, he has planted 80 to 90 percent of his wheat—

Mr. MANSFIELD. Yes, indeed.

Mr. DOLE. This is a set-aside provision in the farm bill, a new provision, and some adjustments may need to be made. But in any event, I also feel that the conference report will be approved. It will be adopted. I would suggest, by a very large margin, because I detect no flat, outright opposition to the report.

Many farmers, regardless of the views of some farm leaders, understand that they may be the last farm bill we will have, because of the question of farm payments and payments. But I believe there is still some hope; the Senate is still in session, and may be in session for some time yet. Indeed, Senator Mansfield has already indicated at the hour of 2 o'clock, the distinguished minority leader will read a letter from the President of the United States, which is in reference to possible action on the conference report. So the Senator from Kansas hopes that this may continue and that the majority leader, I am not withstanding that, I appreciate very much.
the statement of the distinguished majority leader, the Senator from Alabama, and the statement of the distinguished minority leader for yielding to me. He is to be commended for the very fine, frank, and statesmanlike report that he has given with respect the conference report on the farm bill.

My primary interest in the farm bill is in how it affects cotton. I was well pleased with the Senate bill, and had hoped that the conference would agree on the Senate bill. I do not approve of many of the provisions in the conference report with respect to cotton. I do not like the reduction in the number of acres that are to be planted with support price. I do not like the reduction in the support price.

Yet I feel that the conference report, as inferior as it is to the Senate version of the bill, is vastly superior to the 1936 act with its two-price system for cotton, with its bulging warehouses full of cotton on which the farmer is unable to sell, and with the building up of tremendous surpluses of cotton. I would much prefer the conference report to getting no farm bill at all, and certainly I shall support the conference report when it is before the Senate for consideration.

The very frank and candid statement of the majority leader with respect to the inevitable eventual passage of the conference committee's report would certainly make a tempest in a teapot of the statements that were made of this floor from the other side of the aisle with respect to the dire results of a delay in consideration of this time of the farm bill conference report. I was certainly pleased to hear the distinguished majority leader say that he had not been asked by any Senator to delay consideration of the conference report, because intimations of that sort were made on the Senate floor yesterday.

It seems to me that on November 16 or 17, we in Congress can act, if a farm bill and one which is a vast improvement over the 1936 act through it does not come up to the level of the Senate bill passed recently. Some days ago, the distinguished majority leader urged the Senate conference to stick by the Senate bill, and I took the floor and made the same request. Although our pleas were not successful, we do have a farm bill that is on the very threshold of being enacted. It will not be enacted today, but in all likelihood it will be enacted. Of course the country can feel sure that this action will be taken by the Senate. And I am not the only one in the Senate; the junior Senator from Alabama that at that time we have speedy action on the conference report was very much pleased with the distinguished majority leader for yielding to me.

I thank the distinguished majority leader from Alabama, and I assure him that this conference report will have speedy action.

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CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

November 16, 1970

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, the distinguished minority leader has read a letter which he has received from the President of the United States, and it is a good letter; but it is not an in-depth letter in this area, of course, he is expressing the views of the President.

In a colloquy with the distinguished Senator from Kansas earlier, I referred to the highest source on the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in refuting allegations which have appeared in the press that certain Senators are running for reelection supposedly had approached me and asked me to delay consideration of the conference report. I denied that allegation unequivocally; there is nothing to it. I have not seen those Senators who are mentioned in the press for well over a week, but the "highest source" I was referring to was the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, the distinguished senior Senator from Louisiana, who is highly regarded by Members of this body, whose knowledge of things agricultural is unequaled, whose probity and integrity are not questioned, and who I think was treated very shabbily during the course of the conference. So that is the source of the majority leader's predicament at this time, and he would be the man who would handle the conference report.

With that explanation let me say, Mr. President, because of the element of time and not because of a lack of importance, final action on the conference report on H.R. 18546, the Agricultural Act of 1970, will be impossible prior to the ordered recess this evening. It is not an action by the leadership that prevents the completion of this report today. It was the hope of the Senate leadership to consider and dispose of this measure today but we were unable to do so. The scheduling of conference reports—unlike bills reported from committees—is not within the exclusive jurisdiction of the leadership. We work with the conferences on these matters but the conferences maintain the right to call up a conference report at any time they wish. Although the leadership has been unsuccessful in obtaining agreement for final action prior to the recess tonight, I want to assure farmers and others that this legislation will be the first order of business after recess and that it is my firm belief and expectation that this measure will pass in its present form when considered by the Senate.

Although I am not fully satisfied with every provision of this bill, I believe the farm community needs assurance of the structure of the farm program for planning purposes. I give to the farm community my strong conviction that the bill reported by the conferences will be enacted into law and that the farm community may rely upon its provisions as the basic farm program for the remaining 3 years. However dissatisfied any of the farmers may be with the provisions, or for any part of them, it is only realistic to state that these provisions will be the law and actions should be taken by the farmers based upon these provisions.

We have heard references to wheat, feed grains, and cotton in connection with the farm program, but we should keep in mind that other provisions are, and will continue to be, of utmost importance to the farm community and the Nation as a whole. I refer to payment limitations, dairying, extension of Public Law 480, extension of the Wool Act, rural development, including crop and conversion, as well as the so-called greenspan program, and other provisions which would be of special importance to the small farmers.

I want to assure the Senate that it is only the time factor that prevents action prior to recess. The rules of the Senate permit delay very readily. When an adjournment or recess has been ordered, it is very easy for any Senator to prevent action prior to recess. Measures of great controversy can be delayed very easily.

As I said before, the farm bill will be the first order of business when we return; it shall pass the Senate—like the Occupational Health and Safety bill, another controversial measure delayed just this week from consideration during the postelection session. I hope after the election there will be a greater spirit of cooperation so that all important measures can be considered and disposed of in one way or the other by the Senate.

Mr. President, I honor the President for the interest he has taken in this most important program, this most significant conference report. I have tried to set the record straight as far as I could, and I want to assure the President that I will do everything I possibly can to see that this matter is the first order of business on our return on the 16th of November.