

News from Senator

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HOUSTON SUMMIT; AGRICULTURE SUBSIDIES

ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS, THE SEVEN LEADERS AT THE HOUSTON SUMMIT HAVE REACHED A COMPROMISE ON THE LAST MAJOR ISSUE OF CONTENTION -- THE QUESTION OF AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES.

"COMPROMISE" IS SOMETHING WE UNDERSTAND AROUND HERE. WE KNOW THAT SOME COMPROMISES ARE REAL; SOME ARE RHETORICAL -- THEY AMOUNT TO AN AGREEMENT TO DISAGREE.

IF THE PRESS REPORTS ARE CORRECT, THE LANGUAGE OF THIS COMPROMISE IS AS FOLLOWS: EACH NATION WILL MAKE "SUBSTANTIAL, PROGRESSIVE REDUCTIONS [IN FARM SUBSIDIES] MEASURED BY AN AGREED METHOD."

WHENEVER I SEE AN AGREEMENT WITH A WORD LIKE "SUBSTANTIAL" -- A WORD SUBJECT TO A WIDE RANGE OF DEFINITIONS -- I START TO WONDER. AND WHENEVER I SEE AN AGREEMENT THAT SAYS THE ISSUE WILL BE RESOLVED BY SOME SUBSEQUENT AGREEMENT -- THEN I REALLY WONDER.

US POLICY IS RIGHT

LET ME BE CLEAR: PRESIDENT BUSH WAS DEAD RIGHT ON THIS MATTER. OUR POLICY IS DEAD RIGHT. WE WANT TO SEE ALL SUBSIDIES ELIMINATED; WE WANT OUR FARMERS TO COMPETE ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD -- BECAUSE WE KNOW IF WE HAVE THAT KIND OF FIELD, OUR FARMERS WILL PLAY A WINNING GAME.

BUT WE ALSO KNOW THAT, RIGHT NOW, SOME OF OUR ALLIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE EEC, KEEP TRYING TO TILT THAT PLAYING FIELD FURTHER AND FURTHER IN THEIR OWN FAVOR -- THROUGH THE USE OF MASSIVE SUBSIDIES.

SO OUR OPERATING POLICY IS THIS: WE WANT TO END ALL SUBSIDIES -- BUT UNTIL WE DO, WE ARE GOING TO USE ALL LEGITIMATE MEANS AT OUR DISPOSAL TO GIVE OUR FARMERS A FAIR SHOT AT THE WORLD'S AGRICULTURAL IMPORT MARKETS.

THAT'S THE POSITION PRESIDENT BUSH TOOK, AND STUCK WITH, IN HOUSTON. THAT THE POSITION HE URGED ON THE OTHER SIX LEADERS. BUT, OBVIOUSLY, THAT IS NOT A VIEW SOME OF OUR ALLIES ARE YET READY TO EMBRACE.

AND SO WE HAVE A RHETORICAL COMPROMISE, THAT DOESN'T GIVE ME MUCH HOPE FOR ANY EARLY BREAKTHROUGH ON THIS ISSUE -- EITHER THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN THE WESTERN ALLIANCE, OR AT GATT.

BUT AT LEAST I HOPE THAT SOME OF OUR ALLIES HEARD CLEARLY PRESIDENT BUSH'S STRONG MESSAGE: THE UNITED STATES HAS THIS ISSUE VERY NEAR THE TOP OF OUR AGENDA; WE'RE GOING TO KEEP PUSHING HARD; AND UNTIL WE GET SOME KIND OF REAL AGREEMENT, WE'RE GOING TO PROTECT THE INTERESTS OF OUR NATION AND OUR FARMERS.

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