

Bob Dole



NEWS
FROM:

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SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, August 11, 1995

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FARM POLICY AND RURAL AMERICA

WASHINGTON -- Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole today made the following remarks on the floor of the U.S. Senate regarding farm policy and the future of rural America:

When Congress reconvenes in September, the race to write the 1995 Farm Bill will hit full stride. This year marks the ninth Farm Bill that I have been involved in.

Historically, agriculture stands at a crossroads every five years when Congress decides which direction it should take. This year, I believe there is agreement in this chamber about which path to take. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that there is significant disagreement about how best to get there.

When Senators return home over the next few weeks, they will hear from their rural constituents the need for an aggressive farm policy. No doubt, the American people will provide their Senators with practical suggestions regarding the farm policy choices now before Congress.

When we return in September, we will face several choices on farm policy. Three that come to mind are -- stay the course, reduction in support, and freedom to farm. Each choice has advantages; each choice has disadvantages.

The "stay the course" plan is piloted by my good friend from Mississippi Senator Cochran, who approaches the Farm Bill with the conviction that our work in 1985 was sound and that we should continue with this course, while making changes necessary to balance the budget.

The "reduction in support" strategy was outlined by Chairman Lugar early in the debate, and combines a reduction in target prices with the call for planting flexibility and elimination of set-asides -- two points that are a priority in Kansas and much of the Midwest.

The "freedom to farm" concept is endorsed by my good friend and colleague Representative Pat Roberts. Pat, in typical Kansas fashion, has taken the bull by the horns. In the Roberts Freedom to Farm plan, budget balancing is done with a cap on farm spending. This guarantees farmers less income support, but provides them with full planting flexibility and regulatory relief.

I urge all Senators to take advantage of the August recess and re-connect with the concerns of rural Americans. Like many of my colleagues, I am still evaluating each of these approaches, as well as other policy options. But I realize that we must reach agreement in September. In my view, there are certain guiding principles we must adhere to as we pursue that goal.

First, fiscal responsibility. We must achieve a balanced budget and do it in a manner that is fair and equitable to farmers. We have worked hard to balance the budget. The line item veto was a first step towards that goal. In September, we will begin work on a plan to balance the federal budget over the next seven years. Farmers around the country remind me that they are taxpayers too. And as taxpayers, farmers want a balanced budget. All they ask is that spending cuts are fair and equitable. Everyone will take his or her fair share, whether it be in food stamps or farm programs. And let me add that there will be equity in commodity program changes and spending reductions. The ag community must contribute to spending reductions as we move to fully implement a balanced budget.

Second, unleash our productive capacity. We must allow farmers to decide what and how much to plant each year. Planting

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restrictions and idling acreage based on budget mandates instead of supply management must end. To take advantage of the new markets and new opportunities opened by GATT and NAFTA, we must be able to meet growing world demand. The farm policy that drives the U.S. into the 21st century should not be based on the supply management concepts of the 1930's. A farmer's business decisions should not be based on government policy, but instead on market signals, agronomic practices and personal choice.

Third, simplicity. Farm programs and environmental regulations should be simpler and more sensible. They should reflect a basic respect for private property rights and the work ethic of the family farmer. For several years now, as I traveled through Kansas and throughout the country, farmers have been telling me the same thing -- keep it simple. All farm programs -- and especially all regulations -- must be simpler and less intrusive. Our efforts to provide regulatory relief for rural America have been blocked by those on other side of the aisle. I hope that when my colleagues return to their home states in August, they will listen to their constituents' pleas to rein in the federal government.

American agriculture does not operate in a vacuum. Rural Americans share the Republican conviction that Congress must balance the budget, and that we must provide tax relief, regulatory relief and health care reform. Rural Americans realize that there are important policies outside the Farm Bill that greatly affect their bottom lines. We are actively working to provide the needed relief that rural America is asking for. And we will not stop. The reconciliation debate in September will focus national attention on issues vital to rural America. This is our opportunity to make real progress.

When it comes to policy for rural America, I can not help but be reminded of the Peanuts cartoon, where Lucy pulls the football away from Charlie Brown at the last minute. Unfortunately, just like Charlie Brown, the American farmer keeps running at the ball and Congress keeps pulling it away. A workable policy for rural America is not achieved by taunting the American farmer. It is achieved by everyone -- agriculture, Congress and USDA -- playing together on the same team.

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