

# Farm Bill Betrayal?



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House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas acted like a “maestro” to orchestrate a new farm bill on the House floor, according to Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa. But still, over two days with dozens of opportunities to amend the bill, the Oklahoma Republican could not convince enough of the 234 lawmakers who voted “no”, including 62 from his own party, to play the same tune.

Shortly before the measure failed by 195-234 Thursday, Lucas made a final plea for passage, urging the House to vote “yes” and avoid the label of “a dysfunctional body... full of dysfunctional people.” But hopes for bipartisanship were largely dashed, with only 24 Democrats voting for the bill.

Lucas won support from top GOP leaders, including Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., and Whip Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

However, the bill – which would have cut food stamps by \$20.5 billion over the next ten years – just didn’t cut enough out of farm and nutrition programs for the likes of those aligned with the tea party, including Reps. Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan., Marlin Stutzman, R-Ind., Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., Paul Broun, R-Ga., and Steve Stockman, R-Texas.

They all voted “no” on final passage, which means these “reformers” basically got nothing in terms of reforms. Without passage of a new farm bill, there will be zero cuts in food stamps and direct payments will continue.

Getting to yes?

So what would it take to convince those 62 lawmakers to vote for passage of the farm bill? In some cases, the perfect seems to be the enemy of the good.

Prior to the final votes, Rep. Huelskamp told *Agri-Pulse* he might vote for the farm bill if the House approved his one amendment to require SNAP beneficiaries to work and cut the program by an additional \$10 billion. His amendment was defeated by 175 -250, with 57 Republicans voting “no.”

However, another amendment by Rep. Steve Southerland, R-Fla., also would have allowed states to require that SNAP recipients seek work. It passed by 227-198. Huelskamp voted for that measure – which would have accomplished part of what he sought with his amendment – but still did not vote for the final bill.

“I could not vote for a bill that authorizes a reform of only \$20 billion,” noted Huelskamp in a statement after the bill failed.

Others conservatives, like Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich., told *Agri-Pulse* the bill would have to be significantly rewritten before he could support the measure because of concerns over crop insurance and food stamps.

Five House Committee Chairmen, including Virginia Republican Bob Goodlatte – a former chair of the Agriculture Committee – voted against the bill. That’s despite the fact that Goodlatte overwhelmingly won a major dairy amendment to remove the supply stabilization provisions.

Amateur hour?

After the farm bill went down to defeat, both Republicans and Democrats took turns blaming each other’s party.

“It’s a demonstration of major amateur hour,” noted Ranking Democrat Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., about the House leadership after the vote. “They didn’t get the results and they put the blame on someone else.”

Pelosi noted that 58 GOP members voted for Florida Rep. Steve Southerland’s amendment, but then they voted “no” on the final bill.

“Why would you put an amendment there that would lose Democratic votes, that is going to make the bill worse?” she asked. “And they didn’t stick with leadership on final package. Isn’t that remarkable?”

Leader Cantor tried to focus the blame back on Pelosi.

“I’m extremely disappointed that Nancy Pelosi and Democratic leadership have at the last minute chosen to derail years of bipartisan work on the Farm Bill and related reforms. This bill was far from perfect, but the only way to achieve meaningful reform, such as Congressman Southerland’s amendment reforming the food stamp program, was in conference,” noted Cantor after the vote.

Rep. Collin Peterson, who serves as ranking member of the House Committee on Agriculture, said he originally had over 40 Democrats willing to vote for the farm bill. But after the amendment passed to remove the dairy stabilization provisions he lost 3-4 members and about a dozen more switched their votes after the Southerland amendment.

“It was a combination of dairy and Southerland,” Peterson said of the two amendments that prompted Democrats to turn away from voting for the final bill.

When Southerland’s food stamp provision came up as the last amendment, “I had a bunch of people come up to me and say, ‘I was with you, but this is it. I’m done,’” Peterson added.

Some Republicans blamed Peterson for over-promising and under-delivering his fellow Democrats to support the bill. But the Minnesota Democrat, who led passage of the 2008 farm bill when Democrats controlled the House, was quick to respond.

“I’m not in charge. They are.”

Next steps?

So what happens next? GOP leaders are looking at options for bringing the bill up before the current extension expires again on Sept. 30. But absent another attempt in the House, lawmakers may once again look at extending the bill.

However, Majority Leader Harry Reid recently tried to nix the extension option. He said the Senate will not pass another farm bill extension and called on House leaders to pass the version of the farm bill that passed the Senate by a 66-27 margin on June 10.

“I want everyone within the sound of my voice, as well as my colleagues on the other side of the Capitol to know that the Senate will not pass another temporary farm bill extension. It’s time for real reform that protects both rural farm communities and urban families who need help feeding their children,” exclaimed Reid. Δ

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