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CONGRESSMAN'S REPORT

By Morris K. Udall

FREEDOM FOR FARMERS -- A NEW RAY OF HOPE

The House has just passed a new piece of patchwork farm legislation with still more high price supports and subsidies, but in the process there was some unexpected encouragement for a return to free-market policies.

In June I voted against a motion to kill the 1962 Freeman-Kennedy farm bill, despite a strong feeling that the time has come to end our crazy patchwork farm legislation. I concluded a report to my constituents on this note:

"My choice was not between 'freedom' and 'controls, ' but between 'Benson Controls' and 'Freeman Controls.'

"The Benson program is a proven failure; Mr. Freeman's program might work."

Thus my first choice is freedom; if that route isn't open and we must have controls, then they ought to be effective.

After defeat of the Freeman measure the House Agriculture Committee rushed out a new bill extending for one year the "temporary" programs of 1961-62. The bill offered more high supports to farmers who volunteer to cut acreage plus \$1 billion "diversion" payments for the land removed from production.

This revised bill was reluctantly supported by Mr. Freeman and the President. It passed with strong Republican support 229 to 162. One member typified House sentiment when he said "I guess I'll hold my nose and vote for it." I voted against it, and voted one week later against the \$5.5 billion Agriculture Department appropriation bill.

The astonishing thing was not passage of another "temporary" farm bill; it was a ray of hope that we might begin one day soon to cut back our costly and tangled price-support programs. I was pleased to play a small part in this significant event.

The most costly and ineffective farm laws are those governing corn and "feed grains." Prior to the debate I joined with a small band of western Democrats in drafting an amendment named for Rep. Ralph Harding (D-Idaho). This provision would have immediately terminated all corn and feed grain subsidies, thus returning to the free market a huge segment of American agriculture.

We had supposed that our gesture would get no more than a dozen votes. To the amazement of everyone it actually passed on a preliminary standing vote, 101-62. The bill's supporters then demanded "tellers," a procedure requiring members to march through the center aisle and be counted either for or against; party leaders can see exactly who is supporting or opposing an amendment. We lost the teller round 111 to 79, and chances for a partial return to free agriculture were torpedoed.

It is not significant that we lost; it is a vital omen, however, that 79 Congressmen were willing to risk the displeasure of Republican and Democratic leaders to support our maverick proposal. I marched through the tellers with a most unlikely group of allies: big-city liberals of both parties, western Democrats, right-wing Republicans, even two members of the John Birch Society.

In a speech for the Congressional Record, I made these comments on a heartening episode:

"Mr. Chairman, I doubt that there are a dozen Members who have not made speeches urging that the Government 'get out of agriculture.' Yet when these beliefs were put to the test by the Harding amendment only 79 Members voted in favor of a substantial step in that direction. I was one of the 79.

"Our present agricultural programs, built in a patchwork fashion over the past 20 years, have utterly failed to resolve our farm problems. I think the taxpayers and urban consumers of this country -- along with a majority of farmers -- are fed up with these open-end, blank-check programs. I think it is time we really started back toward a free market instead of just talking about it. In my opinion, the Government should resume as soon as possible its traditional role of serving farmers only through programs of research, extension agents, information, loan assistance, and rural electrification.

"As a nation we cannot long continue to produce 50 percent more farm products than we can consume. At a time when our Federal budget is \$6 billion out of balance we cannot afford to spend \$3 to \$4 billion on programs which do not work.

"Sooner or later we are going to reduce our farm production to the level of demand. This will occur either through (a) the imposition of farm controls which actually control; or, (b) the operations of a free market. It was my previous thinking that a majority of the Congress is unwilling now to take any meaningful steps toward a free market; for this reason I supported the next best alternative -- the Kennedy-Freeman bill which the House rejected last month. But I refuse to support any more 'temporary,' or piecemeal, or 'voluntary' programs of the kind we now have.

"H. R. 12391 carries an estimated price tag of \$2. 4 billion. I refuse to buy it."