

The bill (S. 1555) was considered read a third time.

Mr. DOLE. Further, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed now to the consideration of H.R. 2924, the bill be considered, deemed read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, that any statements relating to these measures appear at this point in the RECORD, and that S. 1555 be indefinitely postponed; provided, of course, that H.R. 2924 as received from the House is the same text that I now send to the desk and ask to be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2924) was considered, deemed read a third time and passed.

There being no objection, the text was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

H.R. 2924

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. TIMELY PAYMENT OF MARCH 1996 SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS GUARANTEED.

(a) FINDINGS.—

(1) Congress intends to pass an increase in the public debt limit before March 1, 1996.

(2) In the interim, social security beneficiaries should be assured that social security benefits will be paid on a timely basis in March 1996.

(b) ASSURANCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT PAYMENTS.—In addition to any other authority provided by law, the Secretary of the Treasury may issue obligations of the United States before March 1, 1996, in an amount equal to the monthly insurance benefits payable under title II of the Social Security Act in March 1996.

(c) OBLIGATIONS EXEMPT FROM PUBLIC DEBT LIMIT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Obligations issued under subsection (b) shall not be taken into account in applying the limitation in section 3101(b) of title 31, United States Code.

(2) TERMINATION OF EXEMPTION.—Paragraph (1) shall cease to apply on the earlier of—

(A) the date of the enactment of the first increase in the limitation in section 3101(b) of title 31, United States Code, after the date of the enactment of this Act, or

(B) March 15, 1996.

Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, during the past few weeks, we have been advised in writing by the Secretary of the Treasury, Robert Rubin, that it is unlikely that the Government can continue to meet its obligations on or about March 1, 1996. The Secretary believes that he will not have any difficulty meeting the Government's obligations prior to that time. In view of these circumstances, some have suggested that the March social security payments—not the current checks, for February, but those for March—will not be payable. In order to allay any concerns, I am pleased to join the majority leader along with Senator McCain, in introducing this legislation to ensure Government solvency and payment of all Social Security benefits on a timely basis in March.

I urge my colleagues to support swift passage of this legislation. Two important findings are stated at the begin-

ning of this legislation. Two important findings are stated at the beginning of this piece of legislation which help explain our position. First, Congress intends to pass an increase in the public debt limit before March 1, 1996. Second, in the interim, Social Security beneficiaries should be assured that social security benefits will be paid on a timely basis in March 1996.

Let me be clear, it is this Senator's intention to work toward passage of a debt limit extension before March 1. We will not default on our debts. That I find unthinkable. What this legislation does is simply ensure that timely payment of the March Social Security benefit payments and allow these checks to be mailed and cashed without any delay.

The bill provides temporary relief from the current \$4.9 trillion debt limit, and creates new legal borrowing authority not subject to the debt limit for a short period of time. The amount of this new legal borrowing authority is equal to the amount of the full Social Security benefit payments for March, approximately \$28 billion.

By creating new borrowing authority, this bill also allows full payment of all other U.S. Government obligations due on March 1, 1996, including veterans benefits, Medicare and SSI payments, Federal employee pay, and military and civil service retirement payments.

Mr. DOLE. What this does do is it makes certain there will be timely payments made. There will not be any delay of payments of Social Security.

I ask unanimous consent a summary of H.R. 2924 and S. 1555 be printed in the RECORD at this point.

There being no objection, the summary was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SUMMARY OF H.R. 2924, SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT PAYMENT GUARANTEE

Findings: Congress intends to pass an increase in the public debt limit before March 1, 1996.

Bill ensures the timely payment of the March Social Security benefit payments and allows these checks to be mailed and cashed without any delay.

Bill provides temporary relief from the current \$4.9 trillion limit, and creates new legal borrowing authority not subject to the debt limit until March 15, 1996.

The amount of this new legal borrowing authority is equal to the amount of the full Social Security benefit payments for March (approximately \$28 billion).

By creating new borrowing authority, this bill also allows full payment of all other U.S. Government obligations due on March 1, 1996, including veterans benefits, Medicare payments and military and civil service retirement payments.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I will yield the floor in just a moment. Farm bills are very difficult to pass. I can recall other years when we have had this same tug of war.

There was a time when farm bills were bipartisan. I am not certain that

is the case. There is some bipartisan ship now. Many years ago, we sat down in the Ag Committee, we worked out a bill, brought it to the floor, and the committee never wavered. Now most things are done on a party-line basis.

But I want the record to reflect that the President vetoed a farm bill. So, for those on the other side who say "What is going on?" they want us here next week and next week and next week, we are prepared to do anything we can. But if we cannot accomplish anything—we had a cloture vote today. We could have been on the farm bill right now. We could have had a second cloture vote. We had a bipartisan agreement led by Senators LUGAR and LEAHY. We were advised that some of the Members on the other side had been peeled off and we probably could not get cloture on that vote.

So, as we normally try to do, we sat down in a bipartisan way. Was there any progress made? I do not know. But I would share the views expressed by the Senator from Idaho that I think we have gone the extra mile in an effort to go to conference.

The House has not passed a bill. We would like to pass a bill in the Senate. But we are not going to be torpedoed by rhetoric on the other side. And keep in mind, we could have had a farm bill. The President vetoed it. That is why the farmers are concerned. That is why there is a lot of disarray in rural America. We could have had another farm bill today, but I think only two Democrats joined in a cloture vote. So, if we want to get partisan about farm legislation, that is fine. I have heard some very partisan statements this afternoon. But the bottom line is, we ought to go back where we used to be on farm legislation, sit down, work it out on a bipartisan basis.

Do I think that will happen by Tuesday? I do not know. I will be happy to try to help. But I am not very optimistic, as I see some partisanship setting in around here. Maybe there is some reason for it. But our farmers' winter wheat is planted. Winter wheat had to be planted. We could not wait. We planted our wheat. Now we are relying on the 1949 act. I assume farmers may conclude maybe that act is not so bad when they look at what the prices might be. But that is not how we ought to resolve it.

So we are prepared to accommodate the Democratic leader, who I think certainly in good faith will present something in writing, and see what happens by next Tuesday. If we cannot agree, then we will have another cloture vote. I do not know what will happen with that cloture vote. Hopefully, we will have enough support at that point to get enough votes to go on to the Leahy-Lugar compromise bill.

So I hope my colleagues on both sides will keep in mind that farmers really do not care about the politics. They do not care who stands up and shouts the loudest about who is at fault. All they know is that there is no farm bill. They

would like to see us sit down and work it out. There are different philosophies in agriculture like most everything else, but we are prepared to try to accommodate some of the requests of our colleagues on both sides, particularly on the Democratic side, in an effort to get a bill done as quickly as possible.

Mr. FORD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, I understand the frustration. I am a little frustrated, too. I would like to get a farm bill out. But let me make an observation or two.

I do not know, in my 21 years, that we have ever failed to renew a farm bill within the year that it expired. Now we are in the year after the 1990 farm bill expired. This bill should have been completed last September.

We also hear that the President vetoed a farm bill. Well, that farm bill that the President vetoed in reconciliation was a bill that they could not pass out of the Agriculture Committee in the House. So they take that bill and stick it in reconciliation. That was not passed out of the Agriculture Committee. Now, in the Senate, we have not passed an agriculture bill out of the Senate Agriculture Committee that I know of.

So here we are arguing over an agriculture bill that really has never gone through the process. And we are October, November, December, January, and February later. We finally bring it to the floor without knowing exactly what is in it and want cloture on it so we cannot debate it and so we cannot amend it.

The Senator from Vermont, when he was chairman of the Agriculture Committee in 1990, set a record. He completed the agriculture bill in 7 days of debate on the floor—7 days of debate on the floor. Now we want to bring it up 1 day, vote cloture on it, and get it out. No wonder some people are digging their heels in. What might be good for Kentucky may not be good for Utah. But it is a regional bill that we have to bring together and satisfy generally the farmers in those areas. If I were farming, I would be frustrated, too. We have been begging for a farm bill; begging for a farm bill. And all of a sudden we get it on Thursday, want to complete it on Thursday, and go out for 3 weeks.

I say to my friends that they can blame whoever they want to, but this bill is 5 months late, at least 5 months late.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, I will yield for a question without losing my right to the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I will note that the distinguished Senator from Kentucky is absolutely right. In the 1985 farm bill—I see my good friend from North Dakota here, and I think

he recalls the numbers—but the 1985 farm bill took something like 11 or 12 weeks to complete. There were a lot of sessions, as my friend from Kentucky will recall, until midnight or later. The 1990 farm bill set a record. And with the House, the Senator from Kentucky, the Senator from North Dakota, and others, we passed it in 7 days with the distinguished Senator from Indiana—in 7 days. That was an all-time record. But that was 7 days, as my friends will recall, of very intensive debate on some major policy issues involving tens of billions of dollars.

Today I know is a long day. People may be tired. I know I am. I finished work in Vermont about 1:30 this morning and was on a flight right after 6 o'clock this morning to come down here for this.

The distinguished majority leader speaks of partisanship. It really has not been. Farm legislation, to my recollection, has always been bipartisan. We have worked it today. We had one vote of which everybody knew the outcome, the first vote today on cloture. Everybody knew. That was no surprise. The Republican leader, the Democratic leader, and all knew what that was going to be. We had a second one set up where there was a bipartisan coalition seeking it. But then we sought to make it better and to make it more bipartisan—I say to the distinguished presiding officers and others—by Republicans and Democrats. The Republican leader, the Democratic leader, the Republican chairman of the committee, the Democratic ranking member of the committee, and myself sat down and worked out at least some parameters to get us moving forward. I am convinced there is a bipartisan solution here.

This is very complex legislation. Farmers who have to deal with it know it is very complex. I wish it had been done last year. I urged that it be done last year. I understand the other body had difficulty and could not get a bill out of committee at first. We have not had one out of our committee for a number of reasons. It was not done last year. We can easily do it this year, but it would take a little bit of time to work this out.

There are distinguished Members on both sides of the aisle who have strong views who want to have votes. I have not heard a single one say they want to delay it. But at least they want to explain their amendments and have a vote on it. I might have some of my own. We ought to be able to do that. None is asking to hold it up. It takes a few days.

Somebody raised the novel idea today about working out some kind of compromise and maybe we could see it in writing and read it before we voted on it. I do not think that is a bad idea. That is an idea that might actually catch on around here—that we read a piece of legislation and then vote on it. Who knows what the results might be?

So I tell my friends on the other side of the aisle that this is something

where Democrats and Republicans can work together. But while it should have been done last year, let us not make the problem worse by rushing it so much this year that it does not get done right.

I thank the Senator from Kentucky for yielding.

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I yield to the Senator from North Dakota for a question, or a statement, without my losing the right to the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Chair. I thank my colleague from Kentucky.

Mr. President, the Senator from Kansas indicated that the President had vetoed the farm bill. I ask the Senator from Kentucky, is not it a more accurate description that the President vetoed what we call reconciliation which contained the farm bill and which contained a lot more than the farm bill? It had \$270 billion of cuts to Medicare, \$182 billion of cuts to Medicaid, and a \$245 billion tax reduction aimed disproportionately to the wealthiest among us.

Is it not the case that that bill had lots of things in it other than the farm bill?

Mr. FORD. I say to my friend, the Senator is absolutely correct. When you say just pick out one little piece—and the farm bill is a major piece to the farmers—that was in the overall reconciliation bill that contained the massive funding of Government. There were many things in there that even those—it was not bipartisan. We had some on the other side who objected to what was in the reconciliation bill, so voted here, and the President exercised his right and vetoed the legislation. So when you just single out the farm bill, there was much, much more in that bill than just the farm bill.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator from Kentucky. Is it not also the case that the farm bill part of it was a farm bill that many in farm country did not want? It cut farm programs \$12 billion; it meant a reduction in farm income of about 40 percent. And so I remember being at a meeting at the White House with people from across my State urging the President to veto the whole reconciliation bill just because of the farm bill provision.

Mr. FORD. The Senator is absolutely correct. And I might say to him, the President of the American Farm Bureau at that time wrote us a letter saying they were opposed to it also. And I think that is a matter of record. The Senator from Nebraska [Mr. EXON] put it into the RECORD. I think he and the Senator from Iowa [Mr. HARKIN] had a colloquy on the floor and talked about bouncing like the ping-pong ball—the American Farm Bureau's position. I think that confused all of us who were trying to support our farm community.

One thing I found out a long time ago, whatever the American Farm Bureau says I do not follow anymore because my farm bureau at home is autonomous and they do not support anything of the American Farm Bureau until their board approves it or they approve it at their convention. So regardless of what the American Farm Bureau might say, I wait until my Kentucky Farm Bureau endorses that.

But just the idea of representing all of the American Farm Bureau, the head of that organization writing letters on both sides, bouncing back and forth, no wonder we are confused when last year they were opposed to it. That helped it not come out of the committee, I am sure, over there. And then they were for it. And then they want us to be for something they were against at their instructions.

So I think the time for debate and consideration of this bill is more important than I have ever seen it since I have been here. There are radical, radical changes in this bill that in the years to come—and not too many short years—if the freedom to farm bill is passed, the American people will be up in arms when you decouple.

If you do not understand what decoupling is, that is separating the payments, or the income from the commodity from the deficiency payments or the payments to the farmer so the farmer will continue to get the payments every year for 7 years up to \$120,000 a year if you are in four different categories, which you can be and you can still raise your crop and still get big prices.

I think when you are doing that—and the farmers have always said they were against a welfare program, just absolutely, teetotally against a welfare program, and they are absolutely, teetotally for a balanced budget amendment, and to do something like that for them and for them to come up here and say this is something we want, I am not sure the leadership is speaking the grassroots attitude of the farmers, particularly of my State.

Now, you can come up here and say we want the money, we want you to pay us, but then decouple that to take away the safety net, take away the price stability of the marketplace, it is just something that is too radical to do immediately. Phased in, maybe. Phased out, maybe. But we need to think through this one. And I think 2 years from now, if we are paying farmers big prices and letting them get big prices for their product, somewhere the American taxpayer who is sending them the money when they are making big money, or making good profit on their crops, says that will not last very long. I think we ought to realize that and do it now and do it right rather than have to come back and be fussed at a year or two from now for doing something that the American taxpayers will not accept.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. FORD. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. I will conclude. I know my colleague, the Senator from Iowa, is waiting patiently.

GETTING A GOOD FARM BILL

Mr. CONRAD. I conclude by saying I hope very much that we can finish the farm bill matter by Tuesday of next week. I would have hoped we could have gotten it done today. It was not possible. But it is better to wait a few days and get it right than pass a farm bill that greased the skids from under farm producers and eliminate a program for the future.

That is precisely what this Chamber was faced with today, a plan to eliminate a farm program over time, a plan that would have guaranteed the elimination of farm programs because I believe there would have been a scandal when people discovered farmers were getting large Government payments even when they were having high income as a result of high prices that we are experiencing currently. The key is to have protection for farmers in low price years. That is when they need protection.

I think it is critically important we reach an agreement that provides a safety net in low price years and that also recognizes many farmers are hard-pressed by cash-flow this year because of the requirement to pay back advance deficiencies from last year.

I am hopeful we can achieve an agreement between the two sides that bridges those differences and achieves a settlement that is fair for American farmers, fair for the American taxpayers and that achieves a result that ensures we can pass farm legislation for the future.

I likened earlier today the proposal we had to the Reverend Jim Jones when he handed out the Kool-Aid that was laced with poison. It tasted good going down. When people drank it, they were dead.

Mr. President, there is no reason for us to take that kind of action. It is worth it to take a few extra days to get it right.

I thank the Chair. I thank my colleague from the State of Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

PASSAGE OF A FARM BILL

Mr. GRASSLEY. In the last hour and 15 minutes I believe, both before the floor leaders talked and since, we have heard people on both sides of the aisle speak about not having a farm bill, why we do not have a farm bill, even who is to blame for not having a farm bill. The fact is we do not have one, and it looks as if we are not going to have one.

We heard earlier during debate how awful it was—we heard this from the other side—that we were not going to be able to pass a farm bill. You have heard many times this evening that the President vetoed a farm bill, a 7-year farm bill in December. The President vetoed it after it passed Congress.

You heard this side of the aisle blamed because we have not passed a farm bill when this afternoon we had 53 votes for the Freedom to Farm Act. A majority of this body supported the Freedom to Farm Act.

Now, it is one thing to say it is too bad we do not have one, we ought to have one, we ought to stay here and work to get one, but it seems to me it takes a lot of gall from the other side of the aisle to blame this side of the aisle that we do not have a farm bill when we either did pass one and the President vetoed it or we demonstrated today that we had the votes to pass another one.

It just does not add up. It just does not make sense. I do not think the American people are going to buy that argument. They can add. They know what a majority vote is. They know what it means when a President vetoes a bill. They know what it means when the President threatened this week to veto a bill that came out of the House Agriculture Committee by a bipartisan vote, the substance of which was the backbone for the legislation that we had 53 votes for here today. The President did not even wait until it got to his desk, a bipartisan bill. The President threatened to veto it.

It happens that there was a Lugar-Leahy alternative that could have been before this body. What is the Lugar-Leahy bill? It is the freedom to farm bill with a list of about 10 things that the Democrats wanted us to include in the bill, that we included. It was their language, their points. We included them. We never even got to a vote on that today. The President had already sent a letter up here—it has been put in the RECORD by the floor leader—that he was threatening to veto that. And we are being admonished by the other side of the aisle that we should have a bipartisan bill because we have always had farm bills developed in a bipartisan manner?

The Lugar-Leahy bill had added to it just exactly what the other side of the aisle wanted. Well, there may be people on the other side of the aisle who do not like what was in Lugar-Leahy, but they cannot say it was not bipartisan. It seems to me they cannot blame this side of the aisle because we do not have a farm bill, and particularly when the President said he was going to veto it before we ever got to it.

Then we are told that what was bad about the freedom to farm bill that was in the Balanced Budget Act was that it was going to cut \$13 billion, three or four times what the President wanted cut, from farm programs in an attempt to balance the budget. But the bill that got 53 votes today only cut \$4 billion,