

Dr. Burgess Weekly Video Address July 5, 2013

“Farm Bill”

Hello this is your congressman, Michael Burgess. Recently, there has been a lot of discussion over the Farm Bill that the House failed to pass a few weeks ago. I wanted to take a few minutes to share my thoughts with you on that bill.

To give some quick background, the Farm Bill deals with two main things. The first, as you would imagine, is to provide and regulate programs for our country’s farmers. However, beginning in the 1970’s, the bill also included funding for our federal food stamp program. Fundamentally, I don’t think all of this should be rolled up in one bill, but should be dealt with as two separate concepts. There is no reason why our farmers should be held hostage by entitlement spending.

While I had reservations about the bill, I ended up supporting it because it did do a number of important things and I thought it gave us our strongest hand going into the Senate. First, it eliminated direct payments to farmers and consolidated over 100 federal programs. This is the kind of common sense reform that I think we need. These changes would save billions of dollars a year and end the practice of paying farmers regardless of how much they grow or how much income they make.

The bill also made cuts of about \$20 billion dollars to the food stamp payments. If passed, this would have been the largest reduction to food stamp spending ever, ever in a Farm Bill and the first reform to food stamps since the welfare reforms of 1996. Just as important, in my opinion, the bill contained an amendment that would have given states an option to require food stamp recipients to work in order to receive their benefits. This new program would have replicated the “Welfare for Work” program that was so successful in reducing the welfare rolls in the 1990’s.

Finally, because of the work of Congresswoman Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, the bill would have tackled one of the ongoing problems of legislation like this – which is runaway spending. For nearly every bill that comes to the Floor for a vote, the Congressional Budget Office looks at the proposed legislation, estimates what the total cost will be. And this is the figure that most members of Congress base their decisions on, and what is reported to the public. But, that “score” is not set in stone and in many cases those estimates they’ve been inaccurate, so legislation ends up costing tax payers more, a lot more than what was promised. For instance, in the 2008 Farm Bill it was 51% more than what the Congressional Budget Office originally estimated. Congresswoman Foxx’s amendment, would have capped mandatory spending in the bill at 110% of the CBO’s estimates - ensuring that the costs of the Farm Bill wouldn’t unreasonably increase. This is the first time a provision like this would have passed and it would have provided a great precedent for future legislation. It’s exactly the kind of common sense solution that we should be applying to other federal spending programs and it could have been applied to other legislation.

In the end, these amendments and these facts convinced me that we needed to pass the bill. I believe the cuts should have been deeper, but it was a needed step in the right direction. I voted for the farm bill because without it, the overspending of taxpayer dollars on the food stamp program actually continues as it is without any cuts and without any end. This farm bill would have curbed food stamp spending by at least \$20 billion dollars. Unfortunately, now, the spending will continue and ultimately, I think the bill’s failure is a missed opportunity to start scaling back wasteful spending in both food stamp program and agricultural policy. It would have set needed

precedents to lower the cost of future farm bills, and provided a template to reduce government spending in the future.

I know there has been a lot of disagreement about this bill but I do thank you for taking the time to listen. For more information on legislative issues before the United States Congress please visit my website, burgess.house.gov. I hope you are having a great 4th of July weekend. May God bless you and your family, may God bless our troops, and as always, may God bless Texas.