

8/01/2007 Taking the Farm out of the Farm Bill

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a farm bill that was hijacked by urban interests, sacrificing rural America in the process. Strong words for certain, but for the first time, rural interests lost the battle of determining what goes into America's farm policy.

Congress works to renew the farm bill just once every five or six years, so when it is considered, it needs to be done right. Historically, the farm bill has been written by those who work and care for America's farmers and ranchers with a focus on progress, not politics. This is because those in rural America are not concerned with the partisan bickering of today, but rather about working together to see that their way of life continues in the future. The farm bill used to be one of the few legislative measures in which Republicans and Democrats could work together to provide stability in the risky agriculture industry that gives the world its essential food, fuel and fiber.

But that is no more. While farm state lawmakers from across the country and from both political parties worked together to accomplish the best possible farm bill in 2007, the bill that was brought to the U.S. House of Representatives had assistance for farmers and ranchers stripped away and placed into special interest programs. Taxes were increased, labor provisions were added and an urban agenda was advanced.

I support the farm bill. But I do not support the shift to an even bigger government and a greater emphasis on the priorities of urban interests. Not in the farm bill. The bill that came before the U.S. House was one I could no longer support.

We are seeing a historical change in Washington, D.C. The number of members of Congress who represent the interests of rural America - of places like Kansas - is diminishing. In the current farm bill that expires this year, 27 percent of the funding goes to providing a safety net for America's farmers. In the bill recently passed by the House, the percentage was cut by more than half - a change that reflects how disconnected our country is from its food supply.

Those of us who represent our nation's farmers and ranchers have our work cut out for us, but there remains opportunity to get this bill back on track. I have not given up. As the farm bill continues its way through the legislative process, I will continue fighting for a bill that meets the needs of rural America. We must make certain Congress never forgets who provides the food on our table, the clothing on our backs and the energy to power our world. We must do what we can to give farmers the tools needed to keep America running into the future.