

Sandusky Register

Brown named to farm panel, supports farm bailout

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U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, just named to an important committee writing the final version of the farm bill, said he supports the \$12 billion taxpayer bailout planned for farmers hurt by tariffs backed by Brown and President Trump.

Brown, who is seeking re-election this fall, announced Wednesday he's been named to the farm bill conference committee, the panel that will write the final version of the farm bill. Brown is the first Ohioan in 50 years to serve in the Senate Agriculture Committee, his office says.

On July 25, the Trump administration announced it plans to hand out up to \$12 billion of taxpayer money to farmers hurt by what the White House called "unjustified tariffs" put on American farm products by foreign countries. The tariffs on farm exports were imposed by foreign officials who said they were retaliating against tariffs imposed by Trump.

The Register asked Brown if he supports the farm bailout, and he issued a statement saying he does.

"I support action to help farmers hurt by China's unfair retaliation. China cheats, that's why we needed the tariffs in the first place. So it's no surprise they are playing dirty when we try to enforce the rules, and we have to make sure Ohio farmers are supported," Brown said.

"At the same time we need to recognize that tariffs are just a temporary tool that we can use to bring trading partners to the table to negotiate, not a long-term policy. The administration needs to outline a long-term strategy to bring China to the table and secure changes that benefit all US industries," Brown said.

Brown issued a press release in March emphasizing he is working closely with Trump to enable the president's tariffs policy.

"Brown wrote to Trump in November 2016 offering specific steps to work together on trade and Trump responded with a handwritten note," said the press release, which included a link to Trump's "Best Wishes" note to Brown.

Trump and Brown are both using huge amounts of taxpayer money to give themselves a political advantage, said Daniel Ikenson, a trade policy scholar at the free-market Cato Institute in Washington, D.C.

The bailout is an effort “to buy silence and keep the farmers quiet through the election at least,” said Ikenson, who termed the move “classic banana republic populism.”

A case could be made for bailing out American manufacturers, and for consumers are paying more for consumer goods, Ikenson said. A bailout for everyone in America should be proposed, “for the distinct purpose of illuminating the absurdity of tariffs,” he said.

Last year, when the Trump administration announced tariffs designed to help the Whirlpool washing machine plant in Clyde, Ikenson said the announcement was “very bad news for consumers.”

The Wall Street Journal reported in July that Whirlpool stock has fallen 15 percent in several months and that the company has been hurt by steel and aluminum tariffs. Washer and dryer prices have gone up 20 percent in a three-month period, the Journal reported.

Ikenson said his prediction was obvious.

“I don’t think it was a controversial statement,” he said. “When you impose extra taxes on consumer products, the prices are going to go up.”

Brown said he has worked to obtain several farm bill provisions supported by Ohio farmers.

The bill includes a provision to help farmers sell their products directly to consumers, and a provision to target dairy programs toward small and medium-sized producers, the senator said.