



INDEPENDENT JOURNAL REVIEW

Republican Claims GOP Farm Bill is 'Corporate Welfare Bill' in Disguise

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Last week's passage of the 2018 Farm Bill in the Senate was not an unexpected outcome. The massive \$428 billion expenditures bill is one of the largest that Congress puts forward. This year, however, there is a battle brewing over its contents — not between the parties, but rather within the Republican majority.

For years, many have seen the Farm Bill as the paragon of government largesse, bestowing funds on numerous constituencies, many of which have nothing to do with agriculture at all. In fact, the federal “food stamp” program, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), was the largest part of the appropriations that the bill contained.

While that individual welfare program has been the bane of Republicans for many years, it is the corporate subsidies that the bill contains that is drawing renewed fire in this session.

While a version of the bill enjoyed a sizable 86-11 margin when easing through the upper chamber, the House had a much tighter majority for their version. Many conservatives have expressed opposition to a version of the bill and Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.) went so far as to label it a “corporate welfare bill.”

Supporting Rep. Amash's opinion on the corporate welfare content of the bill was the work of think tanks like the Cato Institute and American Enterprise Institute.

Research from those groups cited how the government protected farmers unlike they would for any other businesses against fluctuations in prices, revenues and yields. The government influenced their decision making by subsidizing marketing, conservation efforts, export sales, insurance coverage, and other activities.

Given that the overwhelming majority of farm family household incomes come from non-farm activities and most the subsidy recipients only work part-time in farming, it would seem these subsidies and support mechanisms were superfluous. However, the debate on whether there

should be much modification to those measures was nearly nonexistent. The focus instead was on individual welfare, where 80% of the funds were spent.

With only two votes to spare, the GOP squeaked a version of the bill through that included new stipulations on work requirements for SNAP recipients that, though consistent with the Trump administration's stated priorities, were not included in the Senate bill. With 171 amendments to the Senate version, it seemed pretty clear that everyone had a piece of the pie and would provide handouts to their constituents in some form.

That was likely the main reason the bill sailed through the Senate. The House version received a grand total of zero “yea” votes from the left of the aisle, likely because while Democrats found it anathema that people would be asked to earn benefits which government afforded them, they took no issue with corporate welfare as long as the individual kind accompanied it.

As the bill now makes its way to committee to reconcile the two versions, the news isn't all bad. There is some good to be found within the Senate draft. After decades of obstruction to its harvest, industrial hemp now would be in the clear for cultivation nationwide.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has of late been a strong proponent of marijuana's more commercially viable cousin. He previously introduced standalone legislation for legalizing hemp farming. Instead of fighting that battle independently, he chose to tack the measure on to the Senate Farm Bill.

While some lauded the bipartisan, Senate vote, the late George Carlin would have reminded us that such bipartisanship typically meant a larger-than-usual deception was being carried out. The question now remains whether stalwarts in the House Liberty Caucus will go along with the ruse.