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ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, NOVEMBER
16, 2007

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand adjourned until 8:30 a.m., Friday, November 16; that on Friday, following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders reserved for their use later in the day; that there then be a period of debate of 1 hour prior to the first cloture vote to be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees and as previously ordered; provided that Senator HARKIN be recognized for up to 10 minutes of the majority's time; that Members have until 9 a.m. to file any germane second-degree amendments.

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

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, if there is no further business today, I now ask that the Senate stand adjourned under the previous order following the remarks of the Senator from South Dakota, Mr. THUNE.

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

The Senator from South Dakota.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I want to take the opportunity to kind of make a little assessment of where we are with regard to the farm bill. I have listened throughout the course of the day as Members have come over and accusations have flown back and forth about why we are not making any progress on the farm bill.

Frankly, it is unfortunate because we have a lot of farmers, the people who are actually out there working the land, raising the food that feeds our country and a good part of the world, who are depending upon the Senate to act.

We have heard from farm organizations, as I am sure most Senators have, about the importance of getting this farm bill passed so they know what the policies are going to be, what the rules are going to be, what the programs are going to be as they begin to make decisions about the 2008 planting season.

As I have listened to all the debate as it has gone back and forth, I have heard a lot of my colleagues, and my colleague from Colorado who is a valued member of the Ag Committee—we worked closely on the renewable energy provisions in the bill, and I think we produced a very good bill out of the Ag Committee.

But there are 21 of us, 21 Senators on the Ag Committee, 21 members out of 100 Senators who serve on the Senate Ag Committee. We came out with a bill that we think makes a lot of sense. It was a balanced bill. It addressed the important issue of providing support for production agriculture for our farmers. It had a good strong conservation title that extends and expands in some ways the Conservation Reserve Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, a number of conservation programs that are important to the way we manage our lands in this country and provide good environmental stewardship.

It had, of course, a good strong energy title which I worked on a lot, along with a number of my colleagues on the committee, including the Senator from Colorado and the Senator from Nebraska, Mr. NELSON.

We put together what I think is a good, strong energy title that provides incentives for cellulosic ethanol production. It also had a disaster title, something that we have not had for some time in the farm bill, that provides a backstop against those years when you have weather-related disasters and we have had to come to the Congress and try to get political support for disaster relief.

Oftentimes it has been problematic there. This puts in place a contingency fund, an emergency fund, for those years in which our producers are not able to raise a crop for some reason, in most cases because of the weather.

It has, of course, as my colleague from Colorado mentioned, about 67 percent of the money in the bill going into the nutrition title, which funds many of the programs that help people across the country, whether that is the Food Stamp Program, a WIC program, all of those programs that provide support and food for people who need it.

So it is, as we would say, a balanced bill, a bill that was debated back and forth. There were a lot of amendments offered. We spent a day and a half in the markup. But as I said, what is important to note about that is there are only 21 Members of the Senate on the Senate Ag Committee. That means there are 79 Members of this body who have not had any input in this process up to this point.

Well, when the bill was brought to the floor last week on Monday, which is now 9, going on 10 days ago, the assumption was at that point those Members of the Senate who have not served as members of the Ag Committee may have a chance to get their priorities addressed in this farm bill, to offer amendments they think can improve it.

In many cases a farm bill reflects regional priorities. Different people around the country look at these issues very differently. It obviously has a national priority as well. But I think it is fair to say that a lot of Members of the Senate would want to come down here and offer amendments.

In fact, a number of amendments were filed, some 200-plus, almost 300 amendments. Now I, for one, would like to see an agreement reached between our leaders that would end this bickering and this standoff and get us to where we can process some of these amendments and get them voted on so that we can move toward final consideration of this bill, which I noted earlier is so important to farmers across this country.

But what happened very early on in that process was the leader, the majority leader, did what they in Washington in the Senate called "filling the tree." By that, for those who are not familiar with Washington speak, it essentially means it prevents others from offering amendments. All of the amendments that can be offered have been offered. The leader filled the tree and for the past 9 days now has precluded the opportunity for other Members of the Senate, those other 79 Members of the Senate who do not serve on the Ag Committee, to be able to come down and offer amendments they think would ultimately improve the bill.

What is significant about that is it is not unprecedented. It has been done. They said it was done when the Republicans controlled the Senate. I am sure it was—I do not believe very successfully because I do not think it is a tactic or a procedure that lends itself to the nature of this institution or how it works. The Senate is unique in all the world. It is the world's greatest deliberative body. We really value the opportunity to come and amend the bill that is brought to the floor of the Senate, which is generally open to amendment.

So when the tree gets filled and amendments are blocked from consideration, it essentially shuts down the process that the Senate normally uses to consider and amend bills and ultimately vote on bills.

So where are we today? We are almost 2 weeks into this now, and we have yet to vote on a single amendment. We have not had one vote on an amendment to the farm bill after now having it on the floor for almost 2 weeks.

I have to say, for those who would like to offer amendments and have those amendments voted on, it has been very frustrating. My own view is that we are not going to be able to debate 200 or 300 amendments, but we ought to be able to narrow that down, and our leaders could go about that process. But you cannot even do that when the tree is filled. You cannot even consider and vote on any amendments.

So here we are. A farm bill is something that we do every 5 or 6 years in the Congress. I was associated with the last one in 2002 as a Member of the House of Representatives, a member of the Ag Committee. In that particular bill, which was 5 years ago, we set policies that carried us to the end of the fiscal year 2007, which ended on September 30 of this year. And we now