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Crop disaster relief, Senate Bill 1628

Strom Thurmond

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR THURMOND (D-SC), April 26, 1955, ON CROP DISASTER RELIEF.

Mr. President, on April 1, I inserted in the Record/a statement regarding the terrible crop losses suffered by farmers and orchardists due to a killing freeze more than a month ago. I expressed my views as to the importance of the passage of S. 1628, introduced by Senator Russell and co-sponsored by myself and others.

Today I want to express my views further because of the fact that the Agriculture Department, through Under Secretary True D. Morse, has voiced its objections to passage of the bill.

Mr. President, this bill is not designed to carry out a normal function of agricultural administration. On the other hand, the bill is specifically framed for the purpose of meeting an emergency situation. Emergency situations call for emergency methods.

In a letter to the distinguished chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Mr. Morse expressed three principal objections to this bill.

First, he stated that "it would be difficult to administer." I do not disagree with that statement. Perhaps it would be hard to administer. However, I believe that certain difficulties must be faced and reconciled in view of the disaster which has struck our farmers and orchardists.
The basic crop acreage allotment program is established. There will be no problem of setting up an entirely new program. This bill would merely provide for additional allotments of acreage to off-set the destruction of crops by natural disasters. I am convinced that the difficulties of administration are not as important and not as detrimental to the well-being of this nation as the total loss of crops has been to many of our farmers.

The Agriculture Department has officials scattered all over this country, in the states and counties. I believe there are enough of these people presently employed to administer an emergency addition to the regular programs of the Department. Their troubles would be small compared with the troubles some of our farmers have.

Mr. Morse stated as his second objection that the "bill would be expensive to administer." Some additional expense might be involved. But Mr. Morse did not offer any estimate of the additional cost to which he referred. I cannot see that great administrative expenses should be involved. Certainly additional time would be necessary to assign individual quotas, but why cannot the employees of the Agriculture Department absorb this work along with their regular duties? I believe them to be willing, patriotic citizens.

Instead of seeking arguments against the performance of this necessary emergency work, the officials of the Agriculture Department should look for ways and means to offer assistance to the farmers now when it is essential.

Nothing is unchangeable. Certainly the agricultural pro-
grams of the nation must be geared to the contingencies which arise, as well as to the routine affairs of our farm people.

Mr. Morse also stated as his third point of objection that "the bill would set a dangerous precedent by using acreage allotment programs for insurance or relief purposes which they are not designed to serve." He also said that "we believe that any relief granted should be through recovery measures in which the general public participates."

He pointed out that emergency loans are available to the farmers. But the truth is that these loans are now harder to obtain than at any time since their establishment. Interest rates have been increased to a level equivalent to the rates charged by private lending agencies.

I do not believe the argument that this bill would set a dangerous precedent is valid. Under the provisions of the bill, the Secretary of Agriculture would be responsible for determining that a disaster existed. He would be required to make such a determination only "to alleviate hardship, suffering, and economic losses resulting from disastrous loss or damage to agricultural crops due to natural causes, and to prevent serious dislocation of populations, and other adverse effects on the economies of the areas affected and the Nation."

The Secretary also would be limited in his authority to make additional allocations of acreage for other crops to replace those lost as the result of a natural disaster. The
aggregate for any crop year could not exceed 500,000 acres/or three per cent/of the national allotment, whichever is smaller.

I shall not cite again the results of the killing freeze/which occurred in South Carolina. But I do wish to state/that I have consulted with many of the agriculture leaders in my State/since the disaster occurred. Their consensus is that present measures and methods/as employed by the Agriculture Department/are not sufficient to meet the needs of this emergency.

Mr. President, I hope nothing shall deter this Senate in its efforts to enact this legislation. I am convinced that adequate safeguards have been written into the bill/to allow sufficient discretion on the part of the Secretary of Agriculture/and to protect against undue disruption of the acreage allotment and surplus disposal programs.

In the past two years/our people have suffered greatly from the droughts. Added to their losses now/is the destructive freeze. I hope the Senate will immediately approve this bill/and that the House will take similar action. Given this expression of the views of the Congress, I believe the Agriculture Department will find that it can administer this emergency program/without undue difficulties or costs.