

Adams on Agriculture

Interview with House Ag Committee Chairman Mike Conaway

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Note: This is an unofficial transcript of a discussion with Mike Adams and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway (R., Tex.) from the *Adams on Agriculture (AOA)* radio program.

Adams: Right now we are very happy to have with us the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Chairman Mike Conaway. Mr. Chairman, thanks for being with us.

Conaway: Michael, thank you, buddy. Appreciate you having me on.

Adams: Well, let's talk about what happened last week. What was it like, after all the time and all the work you put into this farm bill and trying to get it passed, as you saw the votes coming in and saw it going down to defeat, what was that like for you?

Conaway: Disappointing, hurtful. Really disappointing on a couple of levels, Mike. We have a great bill, and it should have passed. It was not expected to get any of the Dems, so those votes not going up as yeses were expected—not wanted, but expected. But to have my Democrat colleagues cheer, and laugh, and point, and taunt us, those of us who voted yes, was hurtful to me personally, but that's...I can get over that.

But it also, in my mind, was hurting all those folks out there, and your listening audiences, who are dependent on good agriculture policy being able to help keep them in business, suffering through the economic times that they're suffering through, that they know far better than I can explain, and then to have the Dems cheer on that regard was really disrespectful to some of the hardest working, most decent, caring people on the face of the earth, the folks in rural America who, quite frankly, a 20 hour work week is the second or third job they do to keep the farm alive.

And so really hurtful and disappointing, but energizing in the sense that the folks who voted no for the Republican side, some of them it was about the SNAP policy, but a lot of it was folks who were wanting to do something else, and they were using this farm bill as leverage. And while I disagree with that vehemently, I understand they had the leverage to do that because none of the Democrats came on board.

[Mentioned] you're going to talk to [Kevin Paap, President of the Minnesota Farm Bureau] here in a little bit. Ask him about his guys who voted no on farm policy on Friday as to how they can get away with that to tell the farmers and ranchers out there in America that they would rather play

politics on their side of the aisle in league with Nancy Pelosi than they would to support production agriculture.

So it's going to be interesting conversations that they'll be having to their folks, because quite frankly, there's not a group out there in America that pays more attention to what happens on the floor than men and women in production agriculture, because their livelihoods are so dependent on good agriculture policy, they pay attention. Unfortunately, I suspect many of them were watching last Friday and saw that debacle.

Adams: What about have you had conversations with Mark Meadows, chairman of the Freedom Caucus? And where do you feel you stand there as far as getting some of those members to vote for your farm bill the next time it comes up?

Conaway: It's not up to me on that regard, unfortunately, Michael. It's between leadership and the Freedom Caucus, because I don't have jurisdiction over immigration issues, and that's where part of the deal is. I've had previous conversations, or Mark was previously quoted in the paper as saying there was nothing in the bill that would cause him to vote no, and so I'm expecting that when he and leadership get worked out whatever they're going to get worked out that he will deliver the requisite number of votes to get this to pass.

We passed a rule yesterday that allows us to vote on the farm bill as is, HR2, any time between now and June 22nd, and so my push will be as soon as we vote on immigration, whenever that is, that the next vote will be the farm bill so we can get this done and be ready to begin the conference process with Pat, because I suspect he'll get something done in June as well.

Adams: Will you keep the bill as is? Will you make any changes? Or will the next time you vote, June 22nd, or whenever that is that you vote again, will it be on the same bill?

Conaway: It's HR2. The first time since I've been in Congress we're actually exercising a motion to recommit. That means that you just revote the bill that was voted on Friday. And so no, there's no changes to the bill. We will bring HR2 right back exactly as it is, because we lost because of the...not the policy, but because of other issues being used as leverage, so it'll be the same bill.

Adams: Talking with the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Chairman Mike Conaway. What's it like, and what is your message to farmers? I mean, we, for all the talk about crop insurance, and sugar, and ARC, and PLC, and CRP, and all this, really the bill came down to immigration and food stamps. And while those are important issues, for those to really defeat a farm bill I think has a lot of people kind of wondering how can you get a farm bill passed in this kind of environment.

Conaway: Well, if we'd gotten beat just on the bill itself last week, we'd have a different conversation, but we didn't. There are enough votes in the Freedom Caucus, led by Mark Meadows and the folks he's negotiating on behalf of, that if they get what they need on an immigration vote, then I'm expecting him to deliver the requisite number of votes to get us to one vote more than the no votes, so we'll get there.

The moderates, the folks who live in states where we're making some major changes, particularly with broad-based categorical eligibility and insisting that the income test be applied and the asset test be applied, they're in a tough spot, but we're going to continue to work with them to help them explain that—or to explain to them that we're talking about about 400,000 families across the country out of 20 million would be affected by that change in policy, and so the greater good is at stake here. So we hope to be able to convince some of our moderates as well to come across and give us a cushion that we might need.

But right now the leadership is working aggressively with the folks that wanted to—who held the bill hostage to get them what they are insisting on, and we're going to move forward. So I'd have a different conversation with you if I'd have lost it on its merits, but that's not why we lost last week.

Adams: Senator Grassley keeps pushing for payment limits. Mark Meadows has even brought that up from the Freedom Caucus. Do you feel you should have done something with that in your bill, or you have any regrets on that?

Conaway: Nope, not at all. We would have fought that off had they brought it to the floor. With all due respect to Senator Grassley, he's wrong. He's wrong every single time. And we'll continue to leave our bill as it is. But no, I don't have any regrets at all.

And the only thing I can't do right now, Mike, is begin to negotiate with the Senate on what they ought to have, what we ought to have. We're going to get our bill as is, and then Pat Roberts, who has to have eight or nine Democratic votes, his bill will be different from ours, and then we go to conference. But no, I'm comfortable that we need to get our bill passed as is.

Adams: Around June 22nd, is that when you think we'll have a vote on it again?

Conaway: Between now and then. It's good through June 22nd. We could pass another rule at some point in time to extend even that date. We'll have until the end of this Congress to trigger that motion to recommit. But right now the rule is set for June 22nd—sometime between now and June 22nd.

Adams: After the immigration vote, right?

Conaway: That's the narrative. I'm not... I'm kind of at a loss. I'm not involved at all in those negotiations with Mark Meadows, et al., so I'm not sure exactly

what they're asking for, what they got, what they didn't get, all those kind of good things, but broadly stating the issue, I think yeah, they want some sort of a vote on immigration on somebody's bill, and I'm not sure exactly what that is.

Adams: All right, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time, and we'll look forward to talking to you again as we get ready for the next vote. Thank you so much.

Conaway: Thank you.

Adams: Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Mike Conaway.

[End of recording.]