

## *Adams on Agriculture*

### **Interview with House Ag Committee Chairman Mike Conaway**

**June 22, 2018**

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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: All right, so the House passed the farm bill yesterday 213 to 211. Let's talk with the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Mike Conaway. Mr. Chairman, thank you for joining us. How nervous were you yesterday, especially when the vote was stuck at 211 to 211 for a while?

Conaway: You mean that landslide we had yesterday?

Adams: [*Laughs.*]

Conaway: Calling it landslide Mike up here in that monster vote. Yeah, I looked up on the board and I saw there were only four votes that still had not voted, and all of them were Republican, so I was pretty confident, but I was just wondering why those guys hadn't already voted, and we finally got there.

So no, everybody knew it was going to be razor thin. We had kind of a bed check to make sure everybody was going to be here yesterday. We had a couple of folks change travel plans to stay for that vote, which I certainly appreciate. But we got it done. The majority's the majority, and we're now ready to move on. And I'm excited about this next step of getting to conference once Pat's [Senate Ag Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R., Kans.)] successful over in the Senate.

Adams: Yeah, it is expected that the Senate will pass their bill next week. Then you go to that conference committee. Obviously big differences between the two bills. What do you expect as far as how that will play out and what you will be able to keep in the final bill from your version?

Conaway: Well, I'm not sure we can answer that yet until we see what, you know, there's a lot of floor action in the Senate in terms of amendments and changes like that. I do know that the score was just released on the Senate bill and Pat brings it in deficit neutral, like we did, which is, you know, kudos to him for being able to do that.

I do notice that there's about a \$400 million cut to Title 1 and Title 11 to the safety net, which makes it interesting for my colleague Collin [House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D., Minn.)] because he's been bragging on the Senate bill, and also criticizing the House bill for not doing more for Title 1 and Title 11, and yet he thinks that the

Senate bill's better with a \$400 million cut to those two titles. So there's going to be a lot of work to be done, Michael. Premature to, though, where we might wind up and land.

But once Collin—I mean, once Pat gets his version done, then that kind of sets the parentheses for where we're going to wind up. And I'm anxious to get to that point. I also know in my heart of hearts that Collin will reengage on behalf of rural America and production America, the way he's always done, now that we've got this House dustup behind us, and I'm anxious to get him back helping out get to a better farm bill that's blended between the two.

Adams: Are you two still not talking?

Conaway: Well, haven't had the opportunity to. We haven't had any floor thing this morning, so... We've always talked. I mean, I just, I haven't had anything to talk to him about on the farm bill because, you know, my mama said no, and I took her at her word, and I kind of got trained that way, so when somebody tells me no, I take them at no, and I don't try to, you know, try to reengage on something they told me no on unless they bring it back up.

But now that we've got it done, that's all behind us. I'm hopeful Collin can put it behind him, and I'll put it behind me, and we'll reengage with the conference committee once Pat gets it done. Pat will be the chairman of the conference committee, and so once he gets his bill done next week, and I've got great confidence that he will, then he will start that process and form it up. Collin and I will appoint our conferees and we'll go about what's probably going to be a pretty arduous task of blending these two bills.

Adams: The stricter work requirements for food stamp recipients, the controversial part of your bill that's been such a challenge in the House, not in the Senate version. How strong are you going to fight for that in the conference committee?

Conaway: Well, I've got three and a half years of my life invested in improving SNAP, and I'm anxious to have the conversation with anybody who will have it as to why, with a 3.8% unemployment rate, people think it's horrible to ask work capable individuals 18 to 59 who are not a caregiver of a six-year-old or younger and are not physically and mentally disabled, why asking them to work for 20 hours a week is such a terrible thing.

It's been in the law for a long, long time. We moved the age up. I got that from 49 to 59. But the 20 hour thing has been there. We don't increase that until the end of the farm bill to 25 weeks. So in farm country, having a conversation with somebody about a 20 hour work week, they typically react, well that's the second or third job that I do just to try to keep the farm going.

So I'll have that conversation with anybody that this quote, unquote harsh ideology that I've been preaching that asks folks who are going to get public assistance to help themselves by training and/or just simply working, why that is so terrible. Eighty percent of Democrats believe it's a good idea, 90% of Republicans believe it's a good idea, and so, you know, I'm anxious to defend this idea that if you're going to get public assistance that we want you to help yourself, certainly for those folks who are capable of helping themselves.

Adams: Is that a deal-breaker for you in conference?

Conaway: Too early to tell. I mean, obviously I've got a lot invested in it. I've got a lot of my Republican members who are insistent that that be in the final deal. But until Pat gets it done, it's premature to talk about any kind of red lines or deal-breakers or anything like that. That sets up a false narrative that I'm not ready to have until we know what the parentheses are. Once we know where the parentheses are, then we can begin to move forward to get that done.

The other thing, Michael, I don't want to do, and I don't think Pat does, either, is negotiate through the public airways and in the newspaper. We need to do that negotiation face-to-face, and so answering a question like that sets us up for failure more than anything else.

Adams: So as soon as the Senate passes theirs, do your staffers start working behind the scenes getting ready for the conference?

Conaway: Absolutely. In fact, we're already doing that. We've got the Senate committee version right now. We've got a chart that shows our bill, their bill for every single section of the deal. We will continue to watch that next week if Pat does, in fact, go to the floor and amendments begin to get added to the bill and the changes. So once his gavel goes down and they've got theirs passed, we'll pretty much know the differences between the two.

And there will, in all likelihood, an awful lot of low-hanging fruit that staff immediately can go to to begin to whittle down the things that the conference committee will have to come to grips with, you know, the tougher items.

But yes, our guys are, you know, they've had a bit of a breather since the 18<sup>th</sup> of May when we got ours done, and now that we got ours passed, I mean, got the one we voted on last night was actually voted on on May 18<sup>th</sup> as well, so no changes to it. But they've been watching what the Senate does, and when Pat gets through next week—and I'm sure hopeful he can—that we'll be ready to go.

Adams: All right, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for being with us. Congratulations on getting your bill passed, and good luck going to conference.

Conaway: Thanks, Michael. I look forward to continuing to talk to you about it.  
Thanks, buddy.

Adams: Thank you. Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Mike Conaway  
from Texas.

*[End of recording.]*