

Adams on Agriculture

Interview with House Ag Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson

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Note: This is an unofficial transcript of a discussion with Mike Adams and House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D., Minn.) from the *Adams on Agriculture (AOA)* radio program.

Adams: All right, where are we on getting a new farm bill done? Let's bring in one of the key people, the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, Minnesota Congressman Collin Peterson. All right, we saw the picture of you and Chairman Roberts, and Senator Stabenow, and House Ag Committee Chair Conaway. You're locked arms and smiling, and it looked good as a visual, but what about behind the scenes? Are you any closer to a deal?

Peterson: Oh, a little bit closer. It's slow going. But I think that the picture symbolized what we've said to each other and what has been, you know, our attitude for the last month, that we need to get this done and we're going to figure out some way to get it done somehow. Hope springs eternal, you know, and it's slow going, but I can kind of see where this thing could end up, but we're not there yet.

Adams: Okay, so we're hearing about now differences of opinion on kind of slicing up the pie, if you will, among different regions of the country, different types of agriculture. How big of an issue is that?

Peterson: Well, I don't think it's a very big issue, but the people that are concerned about this apparently think it's a big issue because we've been going around and around. I just don't think it's a huge issue one way, you know, on either side. It's not a lot of money in terms of the whole bill. And I'm not sure, you know, if anybody's going to actually get that much money out of what they're fighting over, so it's...but it's important to them, and for whatever reason it's an issue, and, you know, it's taken up a fair amount of time, and time that we maybe should have been focused on trying to get the SNAP thing worked out.

But I think we are making some progress there as well. My staff has been reporting that we're making some better progress at the staff level. I had a long talk with Senator Roberts on Friday, and I talked to Chairman Conaway Thursday about getting realistic about where this thing is going to land so we can get this bill done. And they seem to be listening. But like I say, we're not there, and it's going slow. But the idea is, our goal is to have a bill drafted, agreed to, and ready to go when we come back after

the November election, so that's what we're shooting for, and hopefully we can make it happen.

Adams: When you look at the SNAP, do you see a way through this? I mean, from what you're hearing from all sides, do you see a way forward on this?

Peterson: I do. I'm not sure anybody else does. You know, I think there's a way to work this out. But, you know, we're not there yet. And people have kind of got themselves painted into corners on this thing, which is a lot of the problem. And the way these bills got done are part of the problem because the Senate, you know, took this cushion of credit and used that money to basically get every Democratic senator to vote for this bill. At the end of the day, I don't believe we're going to have a bill that every Democratic senator can vote for. But as of right now that kind of seems to be the goal. I don't think that's realistic.

On the House side you've got a bill that passed on a partisan basis, and the chairman seems to think he needs to have most of the Republicans, and I don't think that's realistic either. Because if you get most of the Republicans you're not going to get it through the Senate, and if you have all of the Democratic senators you're not going to get it through the House. So that's kind of where we're...the big picture of where we're at here.

And, you know, how we get there I'm not sure, because people have kind of got themselves backed into corners, and they are going to disappoint people. I don't know what they've told them, but I think at the end of the day if we're going to get this done there's going to be people in the Republican caucus in the House and Democratic caucus in the Senate that are not going to be happy, probably. But that's...generally I've said when we get to the point where everybody's unhappy, then we've finally got a deal, probably.

Adams: Are there big differences? I mean, we're hearing about big differences between Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Stabenow on the Senate side. Are there big differences between those two?

Peterson: Well, they've been defending their positions, you know. As I said earlier, I don't think these...what they're arguing over are that huge of a deal. But they do. And so we're working through it. We've made progress. We're closer than we were. You know, every time we meet we get closer. But we're not there yet.

Adams: Do you see a bill done by the end of this year?

Peterson: Well, that's our goal. And I probably want that worse than anybody else in that room. I want to get this thing done and off the table and get the farmers, you know, so they know what they're dealing with. Is this bill

going to be good enough to withstand what we're facing? Who knows? But it's the best we're going to get. And it needs to get done. So I'm not bringing any problems to the table. I'm trying to be helpful in getting people to where they need to be to get this bill done.

And I absolutely want this thing off the table and into law before the end of this Congress. And the farmers in my area, if they know what the bill is in December, they're fine. They aren't making any planting decisions right now anyway. They're worried about all this rain we got and how they're going to get the crop out. So they're... You know, if we get this done in December, the people in my district will be fine.

Adams: We're talking with the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson from Minnesota. All right, now, and you've made it clear, as you just stated, you want to get this thing done and you want to get it done this year. But if the elections next month give your party power, a majority in either one of the chambers, will there be pressure then in your party to wait and do it in the new Congress next year?

Peterson: No. Absolutely not. And I've had discussions with our leadership, and they are supporting me in getting this done this year. So the outcome of the election is not going to have any impact in the Democratic caucus in terms of getting this thing done.

Adams: All right, that's interesting, because I think a lot of people have been kind of looking at that and thinking, well, there might be some incentive, if the elections go your way, that instead of just—

Peterson: Well, I mean—

Adams: —[waiting] and start over.

Peterson: —Mike, this has been... I don't know why people are putting this rumor out, if it's because they can't get, the majority can't get the bill done, I don't know. But this is nonsense. There's a lot of nonsense out there that you just have to ignore. And the way this thing happened, and the way I had to deal with this, you know, some other people may have just said the heck with you, I'm not going to cooperate.

But I have gone the extra mile, and I did that again on Thursday with Mike, and I said look, you know, some people think I'm going too far, but I want to help you get this thing done. But you've got to move on some of this stuff. And the same thing with Senator Stabenow. She has to move on some of this stuff. And, you know, I think they will. I just don't know how long it's going to take them.

Adams: Before we let you go, want to get your thoughts on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada deal. What do you think, and about the chances of it getting passed?

Peterson: Well, I don't know about it getting passed. I haven't really heard much about that, and haven't talked to our leadership about it. I think it's a slight improvement overall for agriculture. At least status quo, and maybe a slight improvement, which is, I think, a victory, because we were concerned that we were going to end up losing. So I don't see it as a big huge win or anything for agriculture.

And I am going to support it from what I've... unless I'm not understanding—I haven't seen all the language, all the details, all the fine print—but from what I know, I think it's, you know, it's at least as good as what we had under NAFTA. And NAFTA wasn't perfect, but for lots of agriculture it was pretty positive, you know, and more positive than I thought it was going to be.

And, you know, whether we can... You know, I doubt, from what I'm hearing, I doubt that the Democrats in the Senate are going to want to bring this thing up before the end of the year, so I think it's going to get kicked over into the next Congress. And like I say, I think it's not a bad deal. I've told our leadership that. And where they're going to come down I'm not sure.

Adams: All right, Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee Collin Peterson. Always good to talk with you. Thank you for your insight, and we look forward to talking again soon. Thank you, sir.

[End of recording.]