

10-29-09

Farm Bureau's Stallman sets the climate bill record straight

By Jon H. Harsch

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

In Thursday's final Senate Environment Committee hearing on the Kerry-Boxer climate change bill, American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman testified against the bill, telling senators that if the bill is passed, "Increased input costs will put our farmers and ranchers at a competitive disadvantage with producers in other countries that do not have similar greenhouse gas restrictions. . . Increased production costs and lost competitiveness will result in reduced food production and higher food costs domestically and abroad."



American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman testifying in Senate hearings on the Kerry-Boxer climate change bill Thursday. Photo: Agri-Pulse.

Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) challenged Stallman, telling the Texas rice and cattle producer that "We plan on continuing to improve this bill for agriculture. We've increased allowances for rural electric co-ops, agricultural programs. We've increased domestic offsets in this bill and I believe that preventing severe global warming is critical to protect agriculture in New Mexico and the Southwest. Basically, the science says that if we don't act, our climate will shift 300 miles to the south and if you know the geography out in the West, 300 miles to the south for New Mexico puts us in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. . . So you can imagine, no snow pack, less water, bad conditions for agriculture. . . So I really see the way forward for agriculture is being aggressive, is putting in place this pollution reduction bill and moving forward with climate change legislation."

Udall then moved on to other issues, without giving Stallman any opportunity to respond. So *Agri-Pulse* asked the Farm Bureau leader what he would have liked to tell the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee – if the members had been willing to listen. Here's what he told us.

With regard to Sen. Udall's warning about climate change impacts on agriculture, Stallman told *Agri-Pulse* that:

- “The first assumption there is that these events are going to occur and if climate change is going to create the event, then you have to ask what this bill does to change the amount of carbon put into the atmosphere. The reality is, that because this bill is not linked to what developing countries do, China, India, Brazil, Argentina, the rest of the developing world, the other five billion people in the world, this bill is not linked to what they do.”
- “This bill in and of itself will do fundamentally nothing to affect that climatic process, to the extent you believe it is going to happen.”
- “If you believe, as many do, that we're in a long-term natural warming trend and that it is cyclical over the course of the Earth's history, then you have to start talking about adaptation and mitigation measures and yes, that means researching efficient use of water, that means biotechnology, drought tolerance, all of those kinds of things, technology which already exists and which can be expanded with research.”
- “I wish Senator Udall would have given me the opportunity to answer the question, because if you think that this bill does anything to avoid the scenario that he talked about, well he's wrong. Because this bill does not do that.”

With regard to improving the Kerry-Boxer bill to make it more acceptable to Farm Bureau, Stallman said “We will definitely have input into this bill. We're working with senators in terms of how this bill will look at the end of the day.” Calling specifically for “a robust agricultural offsets program that is at least as good as what's in the House if not better,” Stallman said “That is being worked on. Senator Klobuchar, Senator Stabenow, Senator Lincoln obviously and others will be working on this.”

As a result of working with the senators, Stallman says he is “reasonably optimistic that we will get agricultural provisions at least as good as what we got in the House.” But he added that “Still that is not going to address some of our overall concerns about what the bill means for agriculture economically for the long term.” He explained that “The input cost increases, we believe, will outweigh the benefits. The only way you achieve the positive outlook that the EPA analysis had in it is by assuming that there will be much reduced crop production, thereby raising prices and having higher food prices and more cropland moving into forestry. We are very concerned about that because that means in effect the downsizing of American agriculture.”

Stallman charges that “we need to take the time to have significant analysis. I don't know any corporation that would run off and try to implement a project on this scale without looking at everything, without looking at a best case scenario, without looking at a worst case scenario and trying to analyze where the possibilities were. That's what's missing here. There's too much of a rush in trying to implement a mandatory cap-and-trade program that has economy-wide effects.”

Rejecting the argument that the U.S. should pass climate change legislation so that it can claim a leadership position at the United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen which start December 7th, Stallman said:

- “We have said all along that we should not be unilaterally passing domestic legislation here and using the rationale that we have to have that to go to the Copenhagen negotiations.”
- “If you’ve been involved in any international negotiations, you go in and negotiate the best deal you can, and then you bring it back to the United States Senate or the Congress, depending on the type of bill it is, and ask them to ratify it based on whether it is a good deal for America or not.”
- “That’s the process we think needs to unfold. We don’t need to be worrying about passing legislation here before we go negotiate in Copenhagen.”

For copies of the written testimony from the 53 witnesses in this week’s three Senate climate-bill hearings Oct. 27, 28 and 29, as well as webcasts of three hearings, go to: <http://epw.senate.gov>. For more *Agri-Pulse* coverage of the three days, go to: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091029H1.pdf>, <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091028H1.pdf>, & <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091027H1.pdf>

#30