

Congress sends a farm bill to Bush _ again (Associated Press, DC)

Congress on Thursday sent a \$290 billion farm bill to President Bush for a second time in an effort to fix a printing error that has threatened the delivery of U.S. food aid abroad.

To ensure that the aid continues amid a global hunger crisis, Congress and Bush were planning to again pass, veto and enact the bill to provide farm subsidies, food stamps and other nutrition programs over the next five years.

The Senate passed the bill 77-15, two weeks after the discovery that 34 pages of the legislation extending those aid programs were missing from the parchment copy that Congress sent the White House. Bush vetoed that version and the House and Senate then enacted it with two-thirds majority votes overriding the veto.

All of it became law, except for the section dealing with international food aid. The House voted to pass the entire bill again, and Thursday's Senate action will send it to Bush for what the White House says will be a second veto.

Once that occurs, Congress plans to again override the veto. Then international food aid programs will join the rest of the package as law.

The White House is calling it "Farm Bill II: The Sequel."

"As we find in the movies, generally sequels aren't any better than the original," said White House spokesman Scott Stanzel, who confirmed that Bush will again veto the legislation "once they check to make sure it is complete this time."

Bush claims the legislation, which extends agriculture and nutrition programs, is too expensive and too generous with subsidies for farmers who are enjoying record-high prices and incomes. He opposed the legislation from the start and began threatening last July to veto it.

A bipartisan group of negotiators made small cuts to subsidies in an effort to appease the White House, but Bush said they weren't enough. Republicans in the House and Senate determined to get bigger subsidies for farmers and more food aid to the poor before November's election then abandoned the president in large numbers.

A Senate vote on the redo was delayed most of this week by objections from two of the bill's Republican opponents, Sens. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and Jim DeMint of South Carolina.

Administration officials said Wednesday that further delay in getting the international food aid into law could delay shipments of U.S. aid to developing countries with rising rates of starvation.

"If by this time next week we don't have a bill, then we are going to start to see real problems," said Stephen Driesler, deputy assistant administrator for legislative and public affairs for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Congress must now ready the bill -- called "enrolling" -- so it can be signed by the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore and sent to the White House. It was through this process that the international aid provisions were dropped after a printing error.

Drew Hammill, spokesman for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, said that the process will be watched closely.

"Additional safeguards were immediately implemented and a thorough review of the enrollment process is ongoing," he said.

About two-thirds of the farm law pays for domestic nutrition programs such as food stamps, which will see increases of around \$1 billion a year. About \$40 billion is for farm subsidies, and almost \$30 billion will go to farmers to idle their land and for other environmental programs.

The law enacted two weeks ago also:

- Increases subsidies for some crops and provide more dollars for growers of fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Extends and expands dairy programs.

- Increases loan rates for sugar producers.

- Cuts a per-gallon ethanol tax credit for refiners from 51 cents to 45 cents. The credit supports the blending of fuel with the corn-based additive. More money will go to cellulosic ethanol, made from plant matter.

- Requires that meats and other fresh foods carry labels with their country of origin.