

Senate Floor Transcript
Thursday, December 3, 2015

FLAKE: I raise a point of order that the scope exceeds the scope of the conference to H.R. 22.

INHOFE: I move to waive the point of order raised under the Rule 28, Section 32205, the conference report to accompany H.R.22 exceeds the scope of conference.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The waiver is debatable.

BOXER: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from California.

BOXER: If I could just be heard for 30 seconds or less. Please, please don't -- because if this passes and we don't waive the point of order, this bill is gone. The house bill didn't even have an extension. So if this bill goes down, we have no highway system. Please, vote with Senator Inhofe and myself. It is urgent.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Oklahoma.

INHOFE: Mr. President, both sides have agreed to have five minutes equally divided. How much time did the senator from California already take?

INHOFE: I recognize Senator Roberts for 45 seconds.

ROBERTS: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Kansas.

ROBERTS: I rise to address the point of order raised against the highway bill. Among the many provisions of the bill, the legislation realizes a commitment made by house and senate leadership to restore egregious, harmful, counterproductive, contract break cuts to the federal crop insurance program, a commitment we reached with the house was to reverse these damaging cuts and policy changes in order to protect our producers. That's their number-one priority for risk management. The message from farm country couldn't be more clear -- do not target crop insurance. The point of order would strip out the needed crop insurance fix but it could also --

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: Senator's time has expired.

INHOFE: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Oklahoma.

INHOFE: I'd like to recognize the junior senator from Arizona, Senator Flake, for such time as he wants to use of his 2 1/2 minutes.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Arizona.

FLAKE: I thank the senator. What we're doing here is targeting a specific provision that was airdropped into the highway bill. This isn't an attack on the highway bill. It's an attack on a provision which increases crop subsidies \$3 billion over what is in the budget deal. Now, we are often accused in this body of reversing cuts that we make before the ink is dry. In this case, we actually made a deal to reverse the cuts before the ink was even put to paper. Now, if we're ever going to get serious about controlling our deficit and addressing our debt, then we've actually got to stick to some of the cuts that we've made. That's what this point of order is all about. I urge support of it.

INHOFE: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Oklahoma.

INHOFE: I recognize the senator from Michigan, Senator Stabenow, for 15 seconds.

STABENOW: Thank you very much. I just rise to support the transportation bill and crop insurance. We made a deal with farmers when we gave up direct subsidies that instead we would ask them to have skin in the game and have crop insurance to manage their risk. They have a five-year bill that gives them certainty. We should not pull the rug out from under them at this time.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator's time has expired.

INHOFE: Mr. President, recognize the senator from Kansas, Senator Moran, for 30 seconds.

MORAN: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Kansas.

MORAN: Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the point of order and ask my colleagues to support the crop insurance program. In Kansas, the weather is not always our friend. The most important farm program that farmers benefit from is the crop insurance program. We've eliminated other farm programs over a long period of time in the name of reform but have them replaced by crop insurance. Now crop insurance becomes the target. I yield.

INHOFE: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Oklahoma.

INHOFE: Recognize the senator from New Hampshire, Senator Shaheen, for such time as she needs to use for her side.

SHAHEEN: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. I will be brief. But I think it's important to challenge the provision in this legislation. I support the highway bill. I think the negotiators did a great job

to get us a five-year bill. But the fact is, this provision was not included in either the house transportation or the senate transportation bill. It is an indefensible reversal of the bipartisan budget bill that became law less than a month ago. It is a \$3 billion giveaway to the insurance companies and I think we need to challenge this kind of move when it gets dropped into a bill.

INHOFE: I'd ask the chair on the proponents and opponents, the time remaining.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator from Arizona has a minute remaining. The senator from Oklahoma has 15 seconds.

FLAKE: Mr. President, let me add by saying this is not an attack on the highway bill. It has its own issues. But this provision simply attacks the subsidy here, the \$3 billion subsidy that was added back in after we had agreed in a bipartisan way to these cuts. We cannot continue to go back on the cuts that we've made. And in this case, we didn't even wait a month or two months. The agreement was made on this floor before the bill was even passed. We've got to get away from that kind of practice. So I would urge support for this point of order and would yield back.

INHOFE: Mr. President, let me make sure everyone knows what we are doing here. The budget act of 2015 had major cuts in the Federal Crop Insurance Program. Some of those were restored in the highway bill. If the highway bill is changed -- if this should pass, it has to go back to the house, which means we could not have it this year. In other words, the issue here is not whether or not how you feel about crop insurance; it's whether or not you want this bill. I suggest that 65 members that are here today voted for the bill. It would be very difficult to explain how you could vote for the bill and turn around and vote for the very order against it that would kill the bill for this year.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: The senator's time has expired.

MR. INHOFE: Let's vote.