REMARKS OF A CONGRESSMAN

by Hon. Robert B. Duncan

I feel most inadequate in my present capacity as a commentator on the two preceding papers (Lester R. Brown and D. Gale Johnson). As a member of Congress talking to farm program specialists, I am somewhat in the position of a general practitioner speaking with a group of heart specialists on problems peculiar to the heart. I would far prefer to listen and to learn an, incidentally, perhaps preserve the illusion of wisdom.

I have been a lawyer and as a lawyer, I had to acquire some knowledge about many subjects in order to properly represent my clients in particular cases involving many different interests, including farmers, dairymen, and ranchers. I have served on the Agriculture Committee in the House for two years. All of this is far too little to give one more than the most cursory of expertise. I felt badly during my initial service on the Agriculture Committee that I couldn't come up with ready solutions to the complex problems of agriculture until I looked around and saw how many far wiser than I were in the same boat.

Yet the realities of our system of government are such that the decisions on policy in agriculture, as well as all other fields of governmental interest, are made, and I think should be made, by general practitioners rather than by specialists. Broad questions of national policy cannot be decided only by reference to specific interests of specific specialities. We must not permit the trees to obscure our vision of the forest. Specific solutions to specific problems can frequently be worked out if we have only minimal concern about the problems created by the solution in other areas. For all of its defects, our system of bringing to the decision-making process "general practitioners" aided and advised by "specialists" has worked rather well in maintaining a balance in this country.

The specialist is something of an advocate as is the lawyer in the trial of a law suit. Each need look only to the best interests of his speciality or his client. The decision-maker, be he judge or a member of the legislature, must decide the over-all merits without the chance of being able to close his eyes to one or the other side. He is immeasurably aided, however, by the give and take of the controversy and conflicting interests which, hopefully, will permit him to arrive at the truth and a sound solution.

I think it is true that some of these problems are of such significant local importance that the member of Congress from the affected district becomes something of an advocate himself. In this instance, he, too, tends to be less inter-

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ested in the over-all merits of a proposed solution to a problem and to look only at the result so far as his own district is concerned. Even here, however, the broad spectrum of interest represented by 535 members of Congress guarantees a broad constructive approach to the problem for any such proposed narrow solution must almost inevitably conflict with another interest represented by other members of Congress. In this instance and to the extent we can avoid the combining of multiple pieces of legislation in the same vehicle, these conflicts of direct interest will cancel each other out and the decision will basically be made by the balance of the Congress, hopefully, considering the over-all national interest.

In the statement presented by Mr. Brown, we have heard factual testimony—a statistical analysis—of what we must conclude is an expanding demand for food both in quantity and in quality. The rapid expansion in population and the rising per capita income amply bear out this conclusion. He quite properly further points out that there are only two surplus food producing areas in the world and emphasizes the important stake the American farmer has in the export market with the production of one out of every four American acres now moving into export channels.

Dr. Johnson’s paper, it seems to me, is a plea for freer trade (as distinguished from free trade) and for greater specialization with a significant discussion of contrary tendencies that appear on our national scene today.

The lesson to me, in both papers, is again the importance of realizing that we cannot consider any of these problems in a vacuum. We cannot consider our commodity price support programs without considering their impact on each other and our whole domestic economy. We cannot consider our domestic agricultural program without considering its effect on the world market, on our exports, and our imports. We cannot consider Food For Peace without considering its effect on the commercial market place and our political relations with other producing countries, as well as the political implications in the cold war. We can’t consider our agricultural program without realizing the impact of population control or its absence, the development of the harvest of food from the sea, future power development—nuclear or otherwise,—which might lead to saline water conversion and the reclamation of presently fertile but arid areas of the world, labor policies, conventional reclamation policies, indeed, the reapportionment of state legislatures, and the redistricting of the Congress.

Indeed, my own conclusion is that there is no greater potential for ultimately achieving world peace than a profound and sagacious agricultural policy. I do not believe we will ever have a world at peace as long as half the world’s population goes to bed hungry.

We learn from these papers that no one economic interest in the United States has a greater stake in the expansion of our foreign trade than does the farmer. Yet it is specific farm commodity groups from whom we hear most frequently cries for protection from foreign imports—cries heard simultaneously with those from other commodity groups demanding a greater and freer access.
to overseas markets. It is politically impossible to pursue both courses simultaneously, as Dr. Johnson points out.

I think, too, we learn from this conference and these papers that there is every prospect that the next decade or two will see a change in the nature of our farm problem from one of producing too much to trying to produce more. This, it seems to me, is the justification for reclamation today and even with the tremendous potential for increased productivity in this country, we must lend our best efforts to increasing the productivity of the underdeveloped nations who so far cannot keep up with the increase in their population. We must, without ignoring research in techniques of production, concentrate a greater share of our agricultural research dollar to improving our marketing techniques, both transportation, packaging and others, so that we can get what we produce to hungry people at a fair return to our producer.

I would conclude with only one further thought. I wish that the speakers who have addressed you today and throughout this conference could speak and get their message across to our constituents across this land. I wished equally as fervently that each of the farmers in my district could have accompanied me to the Food and Agricultural Conference in Rome last year to which I was a Congressional delegate. It is important that we raise our sights beyond our own farm, our own business, to know and realize intimately that we are a part of the whole world, that these questions are not all black and all white, that they cannot be reduced to "Are you for us or are you against us?" It is important that we, as a nation, realize that our long-run best interests as a nation and as individuals sometimes run counter to what we think are our short-term best interests. Herein lies the explanations for conflicting viewpoints be members of Congress, all of whom have the best interests of this country at heart on such questions as Food for Peace to Egypt and the beef import bill.

It has been a pleasure to be with you; I assure you it has been most helpful and profitable for me to hear and study both of these excellent papers.