

**Pile of Bills Is Left Behind as Congress Goes to Campaign**  
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**By Jennifer Steinhauer**

WASHINGTON — An effort to provide emergency aid for American ranchers and farmers reeling from a year of drought, frost and other calamities collapsed on Thursday as members of Congress departed for their five-week August recess, leaving behind a pile of unfinished legislation as they go home to campaign for re-election.

After refusing to consider a sweeping five-year farm measure, House Republican leaders jammed through a short-term \$383 million package of loans and grants for livestock producers and a limited number of farmers. The measure passed 223 to 197, a narrow margin for a bill that has an impact on so many states. But Democrats balked in protest over the way the farm legislation has been handled and some Republicans objected to the costs.

Democratic leaders in the Senate, which had already passed a bipartisan five-year bill, refused to take up the House measure, faulting House Republican leaders for failing to consider the broader legislation in time.

"I'm not passing a bill that only covers some producers," said Senator Debbie Stabenow, Democrat of Michigan, the chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Moments after the House passed its bill, Ms. Stabenow took to the Senate floor to say that lawmakers would instead work informally over the August recess to try to put together a new measure to present to Congress when it meets in September. The White House would have considered the House measure, but she resisted, Senate aides said.

Ms. Stabenow, who worked for months to arm-twist resistant Senate colleagues on both side of the aisle to usher her bill through her chamber, said she would begin meeting with House agriculture leaders on Thursday night. "I am extremely hopeful that we can get together around what really needs to be done, which is a five-year farm bill," she said.

The failure to advance the farm bill or the emergency aid was all the more striking given the extent of the continuing drought, with county after county across the nation having been declared an agricultural disaster area.

The farm bill, which has historically appealed to members on both sides of the aisle, was one of a series of measures that fell victim to partisan fighting — and occasionally infighting — in recent weeks. On Thursday, a bipartisan cybersecurity bill that would have established standards for the computer systems that oversee the country's critical infrastructure was stopped by a filibuster as some leading Republicans yielded to the concerns of major business interests.

The renewal of a measure to protect women from domestic violence — an issue that has also generally enjoyed bipartisan support in both chambers — stalled and routine spending bills and tax measures were also languishing, even as Congress faces a year-end pileup of expiring tax laws and spending cuts.

"It's not only the failure to take on the biggest single threat to our country right now, that of cyberattacks," said Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, a co-author of

the cybersecurity bill. "Or to complete the farm bill. But also, we've yet to pass a single appropriations bill. Tax issues remain completely unresolved, as well. I think it's really disappointing."

For lawmakers in states with large agriculture industries, August may be the longest month, as farmers, ranchers and producers clamor for a bill to extend programs that begin expiring in September. The relief bill sought to continue programs that have already expired, ones that indemnify livestock and forage programs and provide some assistance to producers of a handful of other crops, paid for by placing caps on conservation programs in the current farm law.

Without the aid, livestock producers will now have no government safety net programs to aid them in their losses of feed. Without them there is little they can do except find another source of feed or start selling or killing off animals. Crop insurance will take care of growers of corn, soybeans, wheat and most other crops.

Republicans criticized the Senate for declining to take up their measure.

"It would appear this is the only vehicle," said Representative Frank D. Lucas of Oklahoma, the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, who has patiently endured his Republican leadership's abandonment of his bill, the first time the House has declined to bring its own committee's bill to the floor. "No matter what happens in the farm bill process, nothing can happen for months and months. If you want to leave people hurting, I guess that's your choice."

Senator Roy D. Blunt, Republican of Missouri, expressed a similar view. "The idea that we would decide that we would put this off another month," he said, "that we can put these families in jeopardy for another month, not knowing what their solution is, just seems to me to be totally unacceptable."

Many members of both parties said they felt they were returning home for the recess with little to show for their efforts and with the election just three months off.

"Congress has a job to do and that among other things is to pass a farm bill," said Representative Peter Welch, Democrat of Vermont, who is trying to use a petition to force the farm bill to the floor against the wishes of leadership, a difficult procedural maneuver that will require Republican help. But he said scores of Republicans had signed already.

"People are pretty fed up about it," Mr. Welch said, "and understandably so."

Despite the multiple impasses, Congress has made progress in some areas. Both chambers quickly agreed this week to tighten sanctions against Iran. House and Senate leaders reached a tentative agreement that would keep the government operating after the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, without the partisan drama that has almost caused a government shutdown in the past. But that measure must still pass the House and Senate next month.

"I think we've got some good things," said Representative Tom Cole, Republican of Oklahoma. "We did the transportation bill, the student loan bill, but I think we could have done more. I would have much preferred to have a full farm bill. But we're not going to be able to make a lot of decisions that need to be made until the American people decide who the decision makers are going to be. And that's the biggest challenge to legislating right now."

Ron Nixon contributed reporting.

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