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STATEMENT

OF

HON. ROBERT N. PAGE

A REPRESENTATIVE FROM NORTH CAROLINA

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 3, 1913



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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

January 3, 1913.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT N. PAGE, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM NORTH CAROLINA, ON FREE SEED DISTRIBUTION.

Mr. PAGE. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the committee, the chairman said that this was a matter of importance to me. It absolutely is of no importance to me personally, but I think is important to the country as a whole; and I broach the subject here through the courtesy of this committee.

Many of you know as individuals that for several years, as a Member of the House of Representatives, I opposed on the floor of the House the appropriation made for the free distribution of ordinary seeds; but I wanted to make an appeal to the committee in the first instance to discontinue this appropriation. Last year, after the effort that I made on the floor of the House to eliminate this appropriation, I had resolutions forwarded to me as an individual, which I could produce—if I had had time, after receiving the notice of the chairman, I would have produced them and brought them here—from every farmers' organization in the United States commending the amendment that I offered, and the position that I had taken, and saying in effect that this was a waste of the public money; that the agriculturists of this country cared nothing for these seeds; they did not use them. I had half a hundred from local organizations not in my own district, but in districts of various gentlemen, some of them them serving on this committee; from local farmers' organizations indorsing the position I had taken for the elimination of this appropriation. I have for 10 years, since I have been in Congress, voted against this proposition uniformly; and in my own district I do not think there is a single man but commends the position I have taken, and is against this appropriation.

I have been charged at times, by Members of the House and others, with advocating the discontinuance of this appropriation in the interest of the seed people of this country. I do not know, and I have never had a communication from any man who sold seed in the United States of America; and the only people to whom any motive personal to themselves might be imputed are the editors of agricultural papers. I can see very clearly that they might have a personal interest in the opposition because of the fact that they have a certain income from the advertising of seed producers in this country. They almost as a whole oppose this appropriation. Most of them, from Virginia to Texas, editorially have commended the effort that I have feebly made to discontinue this appropriation.

And personal observation—one of the reasons for my opposition is the worthlessness, practically, of these seed, which I think can be demonstrated to any gentleman who will take the trouble to make a little inquiry. Personal observation, or, rather, concurrence, was brought to my attention within the last few months by a gentleman who happens to live in my own district. A very large industry is carried on in certain sections of this country in the cultivation and sale of the Rocky Ford cantaloupe. It is a native of the high altitudes of Colorado and grows to greater perfection there than elsewhere.

I happened to have an enterprising constituent who owns a farm in Colorado, on which he raises the Rocky Ford seed. He is an authority in this country on the cultivation and the raising of this particular fruit. I have his word that the Government contract let for the Rocky Ford seed which the Department of Agriculture was going to distribute was given to a firm of Jews in the State of Colorado, whose name I do not recall at the present time, on a competitive-bid price. That he himself saw the employees of these people, who had been the successful bidders to the Government, going into the cantaloupe fields of Colorado from which the saleable perfect fruit had been gathered and sold, taking the refuse that the farmer had left, to secure the seed that they sold the Government under the contract that they took; and this happened last year. He says they are absolutely worthless, and I believe he knows what he is talking about; and I think, gentlemen, that while I am in thorough sympathy with all the work that has been done through the Department of Agriculture and, by the activities and help of this committee, in anything that extends to the agricultural classes of this country real help—I am in sympathy with all that.

But, on the other hand, personally and in the interest of the people of the country, I do not think we are warranted, that this committee is warranted, or that Congress is warranted, in appropriating a dollar of money for a useless purpose; and my thorough conviction is that this sum, amounting practically to \$300,000, that is expended for the purchase and distribution of ordinary garden seeds, is a waste of that much of the tax money of the people; and I do not think this committee or the House of Representatives is warranted in spending that money; and I wanted merely to make my protest here and say to the gentlemen that I felt that the people that are to be consulted—the people who are supposed to use these seeds—do not want them. And I felt assured that if I could by any means convince you of that fact this appropriation would be eliminated. I have no hope of convincing my good friend from Mississippi. I know his views on this matter; he has as strong views on one side as I have on the other, and possibly stronger; but I think he is mistaken about the service that he is rendering his people by the distribution of these ordinary seeds. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CANDLER. Just a moment, Mr. Page.

Mr. PAGE. Oh, I would be glad to submit, if the committee will allow me, at some time in the future some of the testimonials and editorials and resolutions that have been passed by various farmers organizations, etc., and placed in my hands in opposition to this appropriation.

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Mr. CANDLER. Mr. Page, does not the record in Congress show that you not only have not been able to convince the gentleman from Mississippi, but that you have failed absolutely to convince a very large majority of the membership of the House?

Mr. PAGE. No; I think not. If my friend will allow me, I should say, not that I have failed to convince other Members of Congress, but that the natural eloquence of the gentleman from Mississippi has overcome any argument that I have been able to place before other Members of Congress—if he will allow me to put it that way; and the general supposition on the part of a great many of us that this particular distribution is a personal asset for votes in our districts. And do not people see it that way, and do they not say it? I am very much obliged to you, gentlemen.





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