

competition. Within 10 years there will be no cotton industry in this country if we do not get rid of the cotton program.

Chairman PROXMIRE. Mr. Shafer?

Mr. SHAFER. I would agree that statistics show that food is cheaper in this country than it has been any time in the history of this country, and not only in the history of this country, but it is also cheaper in terms of time spent earning it here in our Nation than it is anywhere in the world or in the history of the world.

So far as I am concerned, I think that this is another place that the farmers have been partly asleep. I see no reason why we should let the nonessential industries of the country take over the spending power of the consumer. Actually it appears to me that the serious situation in agriculture and, as I have tried to outline earlier in my remarks, the seriousness that I believe is involved for the entire Nation, I believe that the entire Nation could well afford to move this percentage of their consumers' time that is spent for food back up a little to keep the family-type farming operation alive in this country.

I realize that the substitutes, and so forth, are somewhat of a problem. But I would like to state that food is food, and if you move from one commodity to another you may have a problem. But when you are dealing with all food items, the elasticity of the human consumption in this country is pretty constant.

In other words, we do not have much up and down in the amount of food that we as people eat. There is some change in which food items we might eat, according to price. But this gets back to our philosophy of bringing all prices up more or less in balance.

If this can be accomplished, I think we can reclaim some of the dollar market that we farmers have lost.

Senator JORDAN. Thank you.

Chairman PROXMIRE. That was a very good question, and I think the answers were excellent, and I am delighted to see this kind of consensus.

I would like to follow this up with a very closely related question, because it is one that I think is very troublesome for this Joint Economic Committee in recommending policy for the country.

Many of the witnesses who have come before us, administration and otherwise, have said the principal problem facing this country is inflation—rising prices. We know that one reason why prices did not increase more rapidly last year than they did was because farm prices were depressed. The farmer, in a sense, was kind of a hero in keeping prices down, but an unwilling hero and an unjustified one.

Mr. GRAHAM. Reluctant.

Chairman PROXMIRE. We do not want him to continue in that hero's mold.

My question is, To what extent in your view would more just prices for the farmer increase the cost of living for the American consumer?

Mr. GRAHAM. Well, that is taking a shot in the dark, I think. Would you mind if I would interject here something to say to Senator Jordan, that there is another area of agreement, and that is in opposition to increased protectionism. I think we are all in agreement on that one.

Chairman PROXMIRE. Yes, indeed. I went over that much too fast, but I think that is an excellent point. All four of you are agreed that