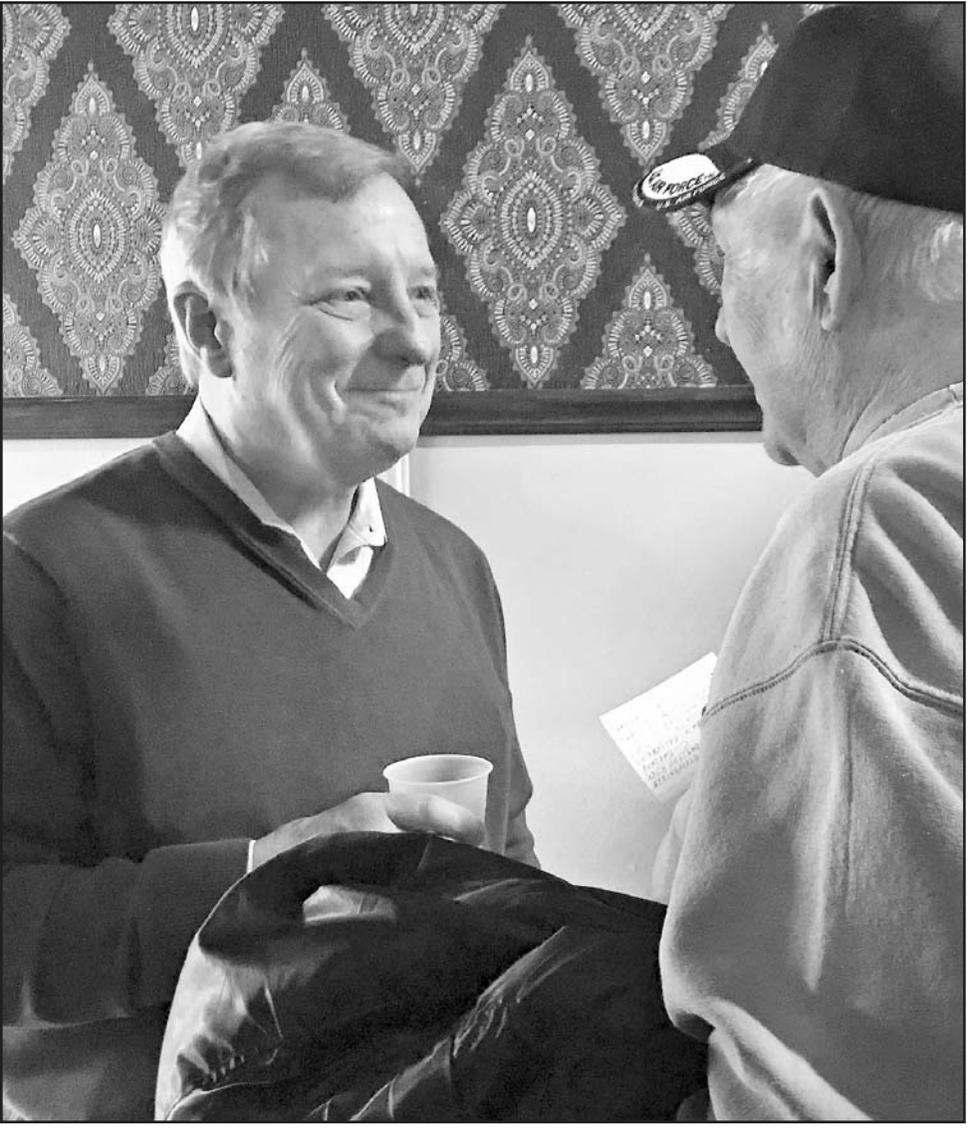


Farmers are shouldering the burden for trade jockeying



BY SENATOR DICK DURBIN

For nearly two years, the Administration has been engaged in a trade war with China. I've seen the consequences this has had on Illinois farmers – from lower soybean prices to seriously jeopardized trade relationships that took decades to build.

As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I asked U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue last year what he would say to farmers caught up in the trade war, and he said, "Tell them they're in the long term game."

After reviewing the Trump Administration's budget priorities this year, which cut USDA by \$21 billion and Farm Bill programs by \$239 billion, it looks like President Trump's long term game for farmers will be longer, and the uncertainty will continue.

Since the start of the trade war, soybean growers have experienced 75 percent drop in sales to China — a \$9 billion loss. In light of the damage done to farmers, the Trump Administration provided trade aid. Farmers in Fulton County received 74 dollars per acre and Mason County received 61 dollars per acre.

What I found troubling is that more than 50 cotton-growing counties in Georgia – the home state of Secretary Perdue – received more than \$100 per acre, some receiving \$150 per acre.

This is concerning, especially when cotton, by comparison, has only experienced a six percent drop, or \$54 million loss, in exports to China.

Forty percent of farm income last year came from the government. When I talk to farmers and the Illinois Farm Bureau, it's clear that they want trade, not aid. We have to get back to normal business.

A positive step forward was the recently passed bipartisan U.S. Mexico Canada

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Agreement (USMCA), which I voted yes on. Democrats helped make this deal better by including strong labor protections and removing a handout to big drug companies that had no business in this deal. USMCA is important not because it may create jobs, or generate domestic economic growth, but because it upholds our existing strong trade relationships with Canada and Mexico. China, however, is a missing piece of the puzzle.

There are ways we can hold China accountable without doing so much damage to the Illinois agriculture economy. I have long supported strong enforcement of U.S. trade laws to counter unfair trade practices by bad actors like China. I also believe that we need to work together with our allies who share similar problems with China.

I'm all for holding China accountable for its unfair trade practices and to ensure the United States has its fair share from the trade relationship. But two years into the trade war strategy, we have few "wins" to hang our hat on, while farmers still shoulder the burden. At what cost is the Administration willing to continue down this path?

SEN. DICK DURBIN visited Mason County just a little more than one year ago. During his presentation at The Main Room he touched on a wide range of topics. The Senator was invited to be this year's guest writer for the Democrat's annual Farm Tab.

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