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LAWRENCE, Kans. -- U.S. Senator Bob Dole (R-Kans.) today urged expanded Kansas participation in the Ozarks Regional Development Commission "to combat chronic underemployment and underdevelopment in the southeastern part of the state."

Dole, writing in the August Kansas Business Review published by the University of Kansas, said, "Strong consideration should be given to increasing the state's geographic and monetary participation in the Commission if we are going to realize the full potential of the area."

The Ozarks Commission is a federal-state group created in 1965 to help promote economic growth in 125 counties of Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas and nine counties in Kansas--Woodson, Allen, Bourbon, Wilson, Neosho, Crawford, Montgomery, Labette and Cherokee.

Noting the 1969 Missouri Legislature set aside nearly \$90,000 to supplement grants from the Ozarks group, Dole said, "There are no state appropriations in Kansas for supplementing the federal grants. Clearly, our state must be more fully dedicated to the Commission if this approach is to help remedy the economic situation in Southeast Kansas."

Per capita income in the Ozarks region, Dole said, is less than 70% of the national average. Seven of the nine Kansas counties rank among the state's top 20 counties in portion of residents on welfare rolls.

A major factor in the area's economic lag, he said, is "the decline of agriculture as the sustaining economic force. With about three percent of the population reporting agricultural employment, obviously more and better jobs in the non-agriculture sector must be found."

Dole praised Mid-America, Inc., a non-profit development organization with headquarters in Parsons, for its work in bringing new industry into the nine-county area.

Urging a study to determine if more Kansas counties should be included in the Commission, the Senator added, "Currently the entire states of Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma have applied for admission. Under present policy, this would lessen the availability of funds to Kansas."

"In my opinion," he added, "Kansas expansion seems reasonable also since six bordering counties reflect very similar socio-economic conditions to the nine already in the Ozarks group."

The counties Dole referred to are Anderson, Chautauqua, Coffey, Elk, Greenwood and Linn. -30-