

FROM: THE OFFICE OF U.S. SENATOR BOB DOLE
STATEMENT ON SENATE FLOOR -- DISASTER ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1970
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1970
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MR. President:

On April 22, 1970, President Nixon, in the first special message to Congress on the subject of disaster assistance in 18 years, pointed out that:

"The spirit of neighborliness, the readiness to extend a helping hand in time of trouble, is one of the great traditions of this country. In the early years of our history, good neighbors were essential in coping with the hardships of pioneer life. They are equally essential in meeting the challenges of life today."

In 1969, the challenges posed by natural disasters surpassed those of any single year since the first comprehensive Federal Disaster Act was passed in 1950. There were 29 major disasters, which included the California floods and Hurricane Camille, described by the U.S. Geological Survey as "the most intensive hurricane on record to enter the United States mainland." As a result, the federal government allocated a total of \$148,970,000 from the President's disaster fund, the largest sum for any year in history. In addition, the disaster loan programs of the Small Business Administration and the Farmers Home Administration were of major assistance during 1969 to homeowners, businessmen and farmers. Food supplies from the Department of Agriculture, community relations services from the Department of Justice, and legal assistance grants from the Office of Economic Opportunity also helped many disaster victims.

Despite the tremendous response of the federal agencies to the major disasters of 1969, President Nixon recognized the need to improve our performance. In his special message to the Congress, he proposed far-reaching legislative and administrative changes. The President found that our disaster assistance program "...has grown in a piecemeal and often haphazard manner, involving over 50 separate Congressional enactments and executive actions." He noted that "this slow development process has created a complex program, one which has a number of gaps and overlaps and needs increased coordination."

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The bill we are considering today includes the best concepts and proposals of S. 3619 introduced by Senator Bayh, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disaster Relief, and S. 3745, introduced by Senator Cooper, Ranking Minority member of the full Committee on Public Works, on behalf of the Administration. Specifically, the following provision from S. 3745 are included in this bill:

1. Provision for removal of the "emergency repair of temporary replacement" criteria of work on essential public facilities, with the proviso that the federal cost of permanent repair or replacement not exceed the net worth of the facility to its predisaster capacity.

2. Provisions to allow the President to contract or make agreements with private relief organizations in order that the activities of these organizations can be coordinated by appropriate officials and conditioning of such agreements on compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

3. Provisions to provide for forgiveness of up to \$2,500 on losses or damage in excess of \$500 on the principle of an SBA or FHA disaster loan.

4. Provision that the State Planning Program would be an ongoing activity rather than expire on December 31, 1970. Additionally, provisions to limit the amount of assistance available to any one state to \$25,000 per annum and in amounts which shall comprise more than 50 percent of the total cost of such planning.

5. Provision that debris-clearance assistance to the states and local governments not be made unless the state or local jurisdiction agrees to unconditionally indemnify the federal government from any claims arising as a consequence of the debris removal.

6. Provision to establish a Community Disaster Loan Fund in the Treasury for assistance to local communities suffering substantial loss because of a major disaster.

7. Provision to authorize assistance in advance of an imminent disaster.

In addition, the President's program improvements to be achieved administratively have been accomplished or are well underway:

- A National Council on Federal Disaster Assistance has been established. The council brings together senior level officials of federal agencies to improve coordination of federal assistance efforts.
- One-stop centers -- The concept has been tried and proven in the recent Lubbock and Corpus Christi, Texan, disaster, making it easier for disaster victims to get information and assistance.
- Disaster assistance teams -- Teams of knowledgeable federal officials, supervised by OEP disaster assistance coordinators, are helping communities and individuals in disaster relief and recovery efforts.
- Disaster research -- Within OEP, a research effort is being initiated, wherein the agency serves as the clearinghouse on all disaster-related research.

During our hearings, both in the field and in Washington, we heard many complaints about insurance coverage for property owners. At that time, the National Flood Insurance Section of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1969, permitting federal insurance assistance in flood-prone areas, had not been fully implemented. That program has now been accelerated, and many more communities are participating. Hopefully, the frustrations arising out of the insurance practices of the past will cease to occur. Further, President Nixon has requested a comprehensive study of property insurance coverage for disaster and will be receiving specific recommendations before the end of the year.

The response of state and local governments to a major natural disaster is one of the most important aspects of effective disaster assistance. We found that there was a wide variance in the ability of the states and in turn the local governments to truly aid their citizens. Oftentimes, those who are designated for such duties are disaster victims themselves. Where there has been an affirmative response, it is often related to the viability of the state and local Civil Defense units. The relationship between the federal government's disaster assistance and Civil Defense activities is under review by the President. I am hopeful he will forward recommended

changes to Congress shortly after the first of the year.

As the President said in his Disaster Message, "... the general framework of our present program provides an effective mechanism for channeling federal disaster assistance to individuals and communities", but this legislation for the first time consolidates our major disaster assistance programs and provides additional assistance in areas in which we have been deficient in the past. It is the result of bipartisan efforts of members of the committee and responsible officials in the executive branch. As ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on Disaster Relief, I join my colleagues in supporting the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970. It will allow us, in the President's words, "...to respond effectively when nature gets out of control and victimizes our citizens".