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FARM FORUM

by United States Senator Bob Dole

Agricultural interests are vital to all Americans, and because of this, are bi-partisan in nature. As a Kansas Senator concerned for agriculture and its future, I encourage close scrutiny and critical debate of the issues, but also urge that farm problems be kept from political squabbles. Neither farm producers nor consumers can afford strictly partisan treatment of such an important segment of our society and economy.

Political sniping in the area of agriculture is no service to the farmer. Such remarks as those made recently by Democratic Chairman Lawrence O'Brien, are aimed solely at political gain: "The American farmer is a mere pawn, a cold statistic in the Republican game of footsie with big business." These kinds of comments are unnecessary, and in the long run, detrimental to the farmer, who now more than ever needs unity, not dissension.

DUAL NEEDS

Presently, the dual farm need of better incomes and expanded markets is compounded by the country's 20-year-old rural to urban population shift, and resultant declining number of rural oriented Congressmen. Both factors feed on each other, and if partisanship should become a third, current farm problems would be dwarfed by those that could emerge.

In years past, there have been times when one political party controlled all federal policy. This, of course, is not the case today. There are, however, some urban Congressmen who totally ignore farm problems, and some who openly oppose farm needs. A few have refused to serve on agriculture committees. In view of agriculture's growing complexities, farmers would face a dim future if partisanship of this type were the rule, rather than the exception it is today.

BI-PARTISAN APPROACH

Fortunately, in this Congress, as in the 91st, farm interests are not controlled by one party, but are being protected by House and Senate agriculture committees. During the past two years, this Administration, and members of Congress, have demonstrated a basic recognition of agriculture's bi-partisan character.

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Traditionally, the two agriculture committees have functioned on a bi-partisan basis. The Agriculture Act of 1970, for example, represents the combined work of Secretary Hardin; Senators Ellender and Aiken, chairman and ranking Republican member of the Senate committee; Congressmen Poage and Belcher, chairman and ranking Republican member of the House committee; and committee members of both houses and parties. Some individuals, however have attempted to divide agriculture problems by party lines. I firmly believe that critical appraisal and free discussion is absolutely necessary in the development of all federal policies; but there comes a time, after all debate, where politics must be put aside, for the sake of the farmer. Too much is at stake for Kansas, the country and the world. My work in farm legislation will continue to be with members of both parties, to develop constructive answers for a brighter agricultural future.

FARM PROGRESS

Some progress has been made. Although farm income is still inadequate, it is rising. With new programs offering farmers new choices, expanded export sales, and rural areas yet to be developed, the farm income's potential is even greater. During the period of 1969-70, the total realized net farm income averaged a 16 per cent increase over the 1961-68 period. Last year's agricultural export sales reached a high of \$7.2 billion, a record that helped to stabilize domestic grain prices. Further highs in export sales are expected for this year.

Despite our past problems, I foresee a bright future for the American farmer. Essential to my assessment, however, is fair, non-partisan attention to farm needs and problems.