



62

NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 225-6521

Joe Reppert—Press Secretary

Release: March 16, 1972, Thursday

REVITALIZING RURAL AMERICA

by
SENATOR BOB DOLE

From the very beginning of our history, the vitality of rural America has been at the heart of our nation's strength. It is in our countrysides that we find generous resources of clean air and water, living space, scenic beauty, tranquility and inspiration for tomorrow's people.

But over the last 30 years, our farm population has steadily decreased from 20 million to less than 10 million. With this decline has come a deterioration in the quality of life in rural America, in that community services in some rural areas have not been able to keep pace with those available in urban centers. To help those who have stuck it out and resisted the temptation to abandon their farms and communities, I have introduced in the Senate this session a number of bills to aid rural Americans.

This week, the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, of which I am a member, has begun considering legislation dealing with rural development. Three of these measures are bills I have introduced, and since all Americans have a high stake in rural development, it seems appropriate here to review their provisions and potential impact.

Rural Fire Protection

On the first day of this 92nd Congress I introduced a self-help fire protection bill, S.69, which would authorize a three-year pilot federal-state cooperative program for the prevention, control and suppression of fires in rural America. Kansas has been a leader in rural fire protection, with some 275 cooperating rural fire districts,

(MORE)

and this bill would expand programs now coordinated in Kansas by the Forestry Service and the Extension Service, making them available throughout the country. Water Supply

In December I introduced with Sen. James B. Pearson a bill designed to aid rural development by making it possible for rural Americans to better utilize watershed projects for water supply storage. S.2960 would simplify the procedures under which watershed projects can be modified to include water storage capacity for future use. In Kansas, as in many other states, there is an untapped source of water supply storage in the local watershed districts; but without the proposed Pearson-Dole amendment to present law, repayment requirements prohibit rural water districts from utilizing local watersheds for water storage. Rural Revitalization Act

The Rural Revitalization Act, which I introduced in November, is one of several bills under consideration that addresses the need for comprehensive rural planning and provides means of financing for community projects and job-generating businesses in rural areas. In drafting my bill, S.2800, I was particularly concerned that the farmers and local businessmen presently living in rural America be given preferential status for participation in and control of rural development and community expansion activities.

More specifically, the Rural Revitalization Act would create the Rural Development Administration out of the Farmers Home Administration, strengthening present FHA farmer programs and expanding its rural development programs. For formulating long range development plans, the bill would authorize up to \$750 million for planning and equalization grants. The Farmer First

As a Senator from Kansas and a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, I will continue to urge my Senate colleagues to approach rural development from the basis of helping the farmer first, and to evaluate any area or community development in terms of the farmers' needs and rightful expectations. In committee sessions and on the floor of the Senate I am emphasizing that the most important consideration of any rural development plan or piece of legislation must be its potential effect on farm living conditions and income. Certainly it is high time that the farmers of this nation be allowed to share in the benefits of our prosperous economy. And, with this revitalization of our countrysides and improvement of the quality of rural living, will come multiple benefits for all Americans.