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DOLE SEES BRIGHT POLITICAL FUTURE FOR CO-OPS

WASHINGTON -- Characterizing America's farmer cooperatives as "sleeping giants," Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.) today forecast a bright future for co-ops' participation in the political process.

Dole, a senior senator on the Senate Agriculture Committee, spoke before the Cooperative League of the U.S.A.

"Up to now, cooperatives have been 'sleeping giants' as far as the political process is concerned," Dole said. "Awaken this giant, and there could be in the 1980s a massive grassroots political surge triggered by the cooperative movement. We may have already seen the beginning with over 20 political action committees formed by farmer cooperatives alone.

"I believe the 1980s offer new challenges for cooperatives -- one of which is increased involvement in the political and legislative process.

"Most cooperatives adhere to the concept of political neutrality. I believe cooperatives should continue on that path. But that does not rule out the basic interest that cooperatives must have in the ongoing political and legislative scene. Cooperatives in this decade need to increase their interest and understanding of the issues facing this great nation, and in the candidacies of those seeking elective office in Washington.

"An estimated five out of six farmers are members of at least one cooperative, and one in three Americans belong to a cooperative of some kind. The cooperative principle among U.S. citizens and those around the world can be identified by improved life-styles, higher standards of living and economic well-being.

"As co-ops spread their influence to all facets of American life, we can look to cooperatives to provide a healthy contribution to our political life."