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NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.-Kans.)

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR BOB DOLE BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND GENERAL LEGISLATION CONCERNING S. 18

Room 324, Russell Senate Office Bldg.
June 3, 1975

This hearing today is for the purpose of hearing testimony on S.18, a bill I introduced on the first day of the session this year. This bill would strengthen the authority of the Department of Agriculture to prevent the entry of the Africanized Brazilian Honeybee into the United States. This legislation is identical to a bill I introduced last year.

The spread of the Africanized Brazilian Honeybee in South America is a very real and serious cause for concern in the countries of Central and North America, especially in view of the steady migration of the bee northward. It has been well documented that this bee can be dangerous to the lives of humans and animals. The vicious traits of the Africanized Brazilian Bees make them a menace not only to the livelihood of American Beekeepers but also to the billions of dollars worth of crops that are partially or totally dependent upon honeybees for pollination. This bill would give the Department of Agriculture the additional authority needed to provide more effective safeguards against entry of the bee into this country. It is my understanding that the Department has already begun taking actions to prevent introduction and is continuing with those efforts. This legislation, if enacted, should be a further step to keep this strain out of the United States and to further facilitate genetic research to counter its aggressiveness. Hopefully, this bill, following the hearing today and subsequent Committee action, will be passed by the Senate and sent to the House of Representatives for consideration.

THREAT IS REAL

In view of the very serious impact this strain of bee could have on people, animals, and general agriculture in this country, I believe we should not take the threat of the bee lightly. In the 18 years since a few African Queen Bees were accidentally released in Brazil in 1957, their extremely aggressive traits have been inherited by the native Brazilian Honeybees that have intermixed with the original African strain. Their vicious characteristics have now spread by intermixing and migration throughout much of South America. The strain is currently spreading northward at a rate of about 200 miles a year and could in a few years reach this country by migration. However, if the bee should either accidentally or deliberately be transported to this country by air, boat or other artificial means, the introduction could come at any time. This legislation, if enacted, would allow the Department of Agriculture to take more positive steps to prevent such introduction.

Basically, the Africanized Brazilian Honeybee (also known as the Brazilian Honeybee) is a much more aggressive and dangerous type, even though there is evidence (which has been questioned by some) that the new bees work harder and produce larger amounts of honey than American domestic bees. Despite this increased productivity, which might seem to make the new bee more advantageous to some, there is a danger for the beekeepers who would have to work with the fiercer bees. Since beekeeping in this country involves many amateurs and hobbyists, inability to work the vicious bees could well destroy the beekeeping industry in this country as we know it. Once the undesirable genetic traits of the African Honeybee got into our bee population, many small beekeepers would probably decide to get out of the honey and beeswax production industry because of inability to cope with the new type of bee or because of opposition in local communities to the presence of any bees at all.

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IMPORTANT TO FOOD PRODUCTION

While honey and beeswax production accounts for about \$150 million in sales, the economic importance of bees is much greater in the part they play in the pollination of over 100 fruits and vegetables. New farming techniques have tended to cut back populations of other insects which pollinate crops, leaving the bee in an important role in this vital process. Honeybees are essential in the pollination of as much as \$1 billion worth of various kinds of crops and they improve the production of another \$6 billion worth of crops.

This pollination could be seriously affected by the new bees in several ways. Since smaller beekeepers cannot easily cope with the new bees, the honey and beeswax industry would probably be concentrated into larger concerns run by professionals. Besides the negative effect of this development to beekeeping as a hobby, or small business enterprise, the total bee population, by being concentrated around large concerns rather than spread out in a dispersed manner among many small beekeepers, would have a lower pollination capability.

For another thing, the Africanized Brazilian Bees tend to kill or run off other kinds of bees and then leave the area themselves, leaving no bees behind for pollination. Since the new bees are more erratic in their behavior, the supply of bees for pollination would be less stable.

Added to these problems, the bees still could not be used safely as pollinators around fields where people would be working because of their tendency to attack.

IMPACT ON POPULATION

Yet another concern beyond commercial agricultural interests and the particular interests of the beekeeping industry is that of the welfare of the general public. There have been numerous documented cases showing that the new bees can be dangerous to people and animals, although there is disagreement over the degree of danger under various conditions. The individual sting of the new bee has been shown, as I understand, to be more toxic than that of the currently predominant strain of bees in this country. In addition, they tend to attack in swarms more often than other bees and to do so with little provocation. They will follow their victims much further also. There have been numerous reports from South America of fatalities resulting from multiple stings or shock and hysteria resulting from an attack by the bees.

In the areas occupied by Africanized Bees in South America, there appears to be a general apprehensiveness on the part of the public about the beekeeping industry. This public relations problem could become another difficulty for the industry in this country, as I mentioned earlier.

EXPLANATION OF LEGISLATION

The legislation which we are considering would tighten up the quarantine measures and, hopefully, avoid any premature introduction of the bee directly into the United States from abroad. My original bill would prohibit introduction into this country of all stages of the life cycle of bees from areas where there are undesirable genetic traits or disease and parasites. As I understand, the Department of Agriculture proposed two changes in the bill, one of which would continue the prohibition of imported semen containing the undesirable genetic traits but would not prohibit semen from areas with diseases or bee parasites since such diseases and parasites are not transmitted by semen. The second change, as I understand, would clarify USDA's authority to eradicate the bee if it should somehow get into the country. I have no objection to the proposed changes to S.18 and unless there is objection, I will instruct the Committee Staff to incorporate the Department of Agriculture changes into the legislation.

In addition to tightening import controls on bees and bee semen, this bill encourages cooperation between our Government and other governments to check the spread of the new bees before they reach our borders. By working with nations located between ourselves and the areas dominated by the bees, we can perhaps stop the spread of the undesirable insects and even figure out ways to favorably affect the genetic traits so as to moderate the aggressiveness of the bees if they do reach this or other countries.

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The proposed legislation also encourages research into the area since we do not know all that we should know to deal effectively with the bees. There may even be redeeming genetic traits which can be utilized in the future, since the bee does show hardworking characteristics.

It is worthwhile, I think, to keep the Africanized Brazilian Honeybee in the proper perspective. Clearly, the bee is not an immediate or urgent threat to us. The potential threat is not as earthshaking as other issues, like the energy problem or inflation, or recession. Yet, despite that, this is a problem of sufficient importance to warrant Congressional action. It is of great direct importance to America's beekeepers, could affect the pollination of \$7 billion worth of crops, and surely would be a real source of concern for the general public. In my view, legislation in this area is needed, and to that end, I have introduced S. 18.

I would ask unanimous consent that three items be printed in the record of this hearing. These are an editorial which appeared in the March 23, Kansas City Star, an article which appeared in the May 24, issue of Congressional Quarterly entitled "Congress Abuzz over Fierce Honeybees" by Diantha Johnson, and an editorial from the Wall Street Journal of December 6, 1974.