

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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FOOD STAMP SAVINGS TAKING 'UNWARRANTED CRITICISM,' DOLE SAYS

WASHINGTON -- Senator Bob Dole (R.-Kan.) today said the Senate-passed food stamp program legislation "has taken unwarranted criticism from those in Congress who sought further cuts in benefits."

Dole, along with Vermont Senator Pat Leahy (D.-Vt.), led the Senate efforts for passage of the Administration food stamp package. Dole is chairman of the Senate nutrition subcommittee.

"We all recognize that there have been some significant problems of fraud and abuse that have plagued the food stamp program since its inception, but I think we should attempt to address these problems by taking action that will directly affect areas of legitimate criticism -- not simply by slashing benefits to needy people for the sake of cutting program costs," Dole said.

"The Senate's passage of this re-authorization legislation last week represents a strong initiative towards strengthening the food stamp program. We incorporated major savings of about \$8.6 billion over the next four years through major changes in eligibility and program restructuring. In fact, the \$1.8 billion in cuts for fiscal year 1981 which the Agriculture Committee made, is a full \$400 million more than the President himself had originally requested. At the same time, a very conscious effort was made to target benefits to the most needy individuals within our society. By doing so, I feel we have fashioned a package that minimizes the impact of the President's proposed budget cuts on the poor people of this country as well as being \$400 million over the House target."

The bulk of the final Senate package was constructed from Dole initiatives. Basically, Dole's actions can be broken down into three areas: the food stamp section of his 1981 farm bill; the Dole-Leahy Food Stamp Accountability Act of 1981, which called for about \$100 million in cuts and recommendations for eliminating food stamp fraud and abuse; and a Dole package of amendments to substitute other savings provisions for the school lunch offset proposal.

"Other proposals which the Senate Agriculture Committee rejected during the course of its debate would have seriously undermined the program's viability," Dole said. "Across-the-board benefit reductions would have required the elderly and disabled to make further financial sacrifices in these uncertain economic times, and would threaten what the President has termed a 'safety net' for the needy.

"Especially damaging would have been a re-instatement of the purchase requirement for food stamps, which would have had a serious impact on participation in rural areas -- not to mention the temptation for fraud and abuse. The Senate Agriculture Committee had previously rejected this proposal in its deliberations, and the Senate confirmed the wisdom of this decision when, as a body, it rejected the same proposal by a vote of 66-33.

"The food stamp program is a reliable barometer of this nation's general economic health. When unemployment and food price inflation are high, then the costs of this program increase significantly. It is my hope that the President's plan for the economic revival of this country will have the beneficial results that have been predicted. This would amount to the most significant and permanent method of controlling the cost of the food stamp program."