

News from Senator

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE
NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON
COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

MR. DOLE. TODAY, THE NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE IS HOLDING AN OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ADMINISTERED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE UNDER THE TEMPORARY EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1983, WHICH PASSED THE CONGRESS AS A HATFIELD-DOLE AMENDMENT TO THE JOBS BILL, P.L. 98-8.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

THERE ARE SEVERAL IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED AT THIS TIME IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS PROGRAM. THE CURRENT PROGRAM EXPIRES AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER 1983, AND WE NEED TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT SHOULD BE EXTENDED BEYOND THIS DATE. S. 17, THE DOMESTIC COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION AND FOOD ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1983, WHICH I INTRODUCED ON THE FIRST LEGISLATIVE DAY OF THE 98TH CONGRESS, ALONG WITH OVER 30 BIPARTISAN COSPONSORS, REMAINS ON THE SENATE CALENDAR, AFTER HAVING BEEN REPORTED FROM THE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE LAST MARCH. THE HOUSE HAS JUST RECENTLY PASSED ITS VERSION OF S. 17, BY A VOTE OF 389-18. H.R. 1590 WAS INTRODUCED BY CONGRESSMEN PANETTA AND EMERSON, AND IS VERY CLOSE TO MY ORIGINAL CONCEPT OF S. 17.

IOWA EXPERIENCE

WE HAVE ALREADY HEARD TESTIMONY FROM WITNESSES REPRESENTING THE STATE OF IOWA WHICH RANKED NUMBER ONE IN PER CAPITA DISTRIBUTION OF SURPLUS COMMODITIES LAST YEAR. IOWA HAS DEVELOPED AN EXCEPTIONALLY EFFECTIVE, LOW-COST DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM UTILIZING A LARGE VOLUNTEER EFFORT, AND IT HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED AS A MODEL PROGRAM BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

THE ADMINISTRATION WILL BE REPRESENTED BY JOHN BODE, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE FOR THE FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE AT USDA. HE WILL TELL US ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT'S EFFORTS TO MAKE SURPLUS COMMODITIES AVAILABLE TO NEEDY PEOPLE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. HE HAS ALSO BROUGHT WITH HIM SOME ACTUAL SAMPLES OF THE KINDS OF FOODS BEING DISTRIBUTED AS SURPLUS COMMODITIES -- CCC STOCKS AS WELL AS SECTION 32 SEASONAL PRODUCTS.

NEED FOR EXTENDED PROGRAM

OUR LATER PANELS INCLUDE DIRECTORS OF LOCAL PROGRAMS, WHO WILL TESTIFY ON THE NEED FOR THIS KIND OF COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM, AS WELL AS SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH THE PROGRAM MIGHT BE IMPROVED, BASED ON FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE. WE WILL ALSO HEAR FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF PROGRAMS IN THE STATES OF WASHINGTON AND PENNSYLVANIA, WHO HAVE ENCOUNTERED CERTAIN PROBLEMS IN ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE ACTUAL COMMODITIES.

WE ESPECIALLY THANK THOSE WITNESSES WHO HAVE TRAVELLED LONG DISTANCES TO BE HERE WITH US TODAY TO TELL US ABOUT THEIR PROGRAMS -- JO ANN ELLIOTT FROM THE PRESCOTT NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, WHICH I VISITED IN KANSAS CITY, AND DR. BEVERLY GABRIO FROM THE F.O.O.D. PROGRAM INTERNATIONAL WHEAT RESERVE IN SEATTLE.

WE WILL ALSO LOOK AT WHETHER ACCESS TO WHEAT IN THE FOOD SECURITY RESERVE SHOULD BE RETAINED IN ANY COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION LEGISLATION REAUTHORIZED FOR FY '84. UNDER THE JOBS BILL, THE SECRETARY HAS DISCRETION TO USE UP TO 300,000 TONS OF WHEAT IN THE RESERVE FOR DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION.

SO FAR, THE USDA HAS NOT USED ITS AUTHORITY TO DISTRIBUTE RESERVE WHEAT. THEREFORE, THE QUESTION BEFORE US IS WHETHER AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF WHEAT FLOUR IS REACHING THE NEEDY UNDER EXISTING PROGRAMS, AND WHETHER ACCESS TO THE RESERVE SHOULD BE CONTINUED UNDER NEW LEGISLATION.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I THINK THAT PROVIDING SURPLUS AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES TO LOCAL FOOD BANKS, SOUP KITCHENS, AND OTHER CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS MAKES A LOT OF SENSE. IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, WHEN AMERICANS ARE IN NEED OF FOOD, WE SHOULD CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO SHARE THIS COUNTRY'S AGRICULTURAL ABUNDANCE WITH THOSE WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE. THIS KIND OF PROGRAM HAS STRONG SUPPORT IN THE CONGRESS, AND IT APPEALS TO THE GENEROSITY OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT AS WELL.