

FROM: THE OFFICE OF U.S. SENATOR BOB DOLE  
NEW SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510  
(202) 225-6521

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GREENSBORO, N.C., June 12 -- U.S. Senator Bob Dole tonight said a long-range priority of the federal and state governments is to help solve the "proliferating problems of the poor through a more reasonable and innovative welfare system."

In a speech here at a two-day nutrition seminar on the University of North Carolina campus, Dole added, "The causes of malnutrition are complex. They cannot be isolated from the other problems facing those who live in poverty."

"So it is that we must develop a basic welfare system that encompasses the total needs of the poor and one which may take the form of income maintenance, a cash transfer or family security plan."

"We must begin the spadework on a rational and responsive system because we can no longer tolerate the existence of malnutrition amidst unprecedented affluence in America."

Pointing out that current food and nutrition programs "are not effectively reaching and serving the numbers of people for whom they were designed," Dole added, "We must do better because we can do better. To do less is to commit untold generations to a continuous cycle of dependency and despair."

The Senator noted the current federal-state commodity distribution program "is sorely in need of revision and upgrading."

"Many persons, lacking exposure to a supplementary nutrition education program, do not know how to prepare the foods that are distributed. Often the costs of traveling to a distribution center are so exorbitant as to totally eliminate a family who may be eligible for assistance," he said.

The food stamp program, Dole noted, "although it is more successful than the commodity program, has several built-in defects, especially the fact that many eligible recipients may be excluded because they cannot even afford to purchase the stamps. Others are deprived of benefits because of complicated eligibility forms and the necessity to frequently reaffirm eligibility."

"The Nixon Administration has moved to sort out and strengthen the nutrition programs and to make them more accessible and understandable to low-income families," Dole said. "The Senate is now considering legislation, which if enacted, will be a major step toward extending more dignity, independence and opportunity to the nation's poor."