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Immediately

RURAL DEVELOPMENT LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, D.C., December 7, 1971 ---- Members of the Kansas Republican delegation introduced today in both the Senate and the House identical bills designed to aid rural development by making it possible for rural Americans to better utilize watersheds for water supply storage.

Senators James B. Pearson and Bob Dole introduced the measure in the Senate, and Representatives Garner E. Shriver, Joe Skubitz, Larry Winn and Keith Sebelius, in the House. The legislation would amend the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL83-566) "so as to provide necessary assistance in connection with rural development."

In floor statements supporting the bills, the Kansas Republicans explained that under the Kansas State Water Plan, the Kansas Water Resources Board is authorized to request the inclusion of water supply storage space in projects constructed by the federal government and authorized under the Water Supply Act of 1958 (PL 85-500.) They noted that in a number of cases the Kansas Water Resources Board had succeeded in cooperating with the Corps of Engineers in obtaining water supply storage in federal reservoir projects. The Kansas Republicans pointed out, however, that there is "an untapped resource" of water supply storage available through the Kansas Watershed District Program, under PL83-566. But at present, laws do not permit rural water districts to utilize watersheds for water storage. Substantiating the "untapped resource" in Kansas, they said that about 70 potential sites for water supply storage within watershed areas have been identified by the Kansas Water Resources Board and the Soil Conservation Service. According to the Kansas Republicans, it was the intent of the Water Resources Board to consider incorporating some of

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these possible reservoir sites in the Kansas Watershed District Program (PL83-566), but unlike the federal reservoir projects (PL85-500), there is not sufficient legislation to make this possible. They explained that while the intent has been to have a similar type of assistance with respect to future water supply in federal (PL85-500) and local watershed (PL83-566) projects, there is a basic difference in the two programs in that the Corps of Engineers projects are federal projects and control of water is in the United States, whereas in local watershed projects, control of the water is in a local organization.

The Kansas Republicans said that in the past, steps have been taken to equalize the authority of the federal reservoir projects and the local watershed projects, but previous amendments to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL83-566) have been too restrictive for rural watershed districts in terms of the repayment agreement. The legislation introduced today, according to its sponsors, seeks to bring about a greater degree of uniformity between the federal and local watershed projects involving future water supply by requiring of the local water districts only "a reasonable showing" that there is an anticipated need for the water and that the local organization or an authorized state agency gives assurances that the federal government will be reimbursed for the cost of the water supply storage.

Without the Pearson-Dole and Shriver-Skubitz-Winn-Sebelius amendment, the repayment requirement restricts local water districts from utilizing watersheds for water storage. The requirement is interpreted as necessitating a local organization to take legal steps, such as the issuance of bonds as is done for municipal projects, but which is not possible for rural water projects.

In researching this legislation for the state of Kansas, the Kansas Republicans learned that there is a comparable need for their amendment to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL83-566) in most other states.