

STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE
IN THE SENATE
MAY 10, 1973

Mr. Dole. Mr. President, a most serious and potentially devastating crisis is approaching Midwestern America. In recent weeks I have voiced alarm at impending fuel shortages which threaten the agricultural heart of the Nation. Other Senators have also addressed this issue. We have expressed our concern in various ways -- by passing legislation to deal with it, by statements to the Senate, and in meetings and communications with Executive Branch officials.

Last Tuesday, at the request of myself and 15 other Senators from Great Plains and Rocky Mountain States, a meeting was held with Deputy Treasury Secretary William Simon and Acting Office of Emergency Preparedness Director Darrell Trent. The purpose of the meeting was to express -- as clearly and forcefully as possible -- the absolute necessity for assuring prompt and adequate agricultural fuel supplies.

Again and again at this meeting, the Senators present emphasized that agricultural operations -- planting, plowing, fertilizing, harvesting -- must be carried out according to nature's timetable, not man's. They cannot be put off to suit a farmer's convenience or to compensate for outside circumstances.

And this is the danger of the present fuel situation. The spring planting season in the Midwest -- already delayed by heavy rain -- is almost here. The wheat harvest has begun in Texas and will be underway in Kansas in 30 days. When the fields are ready, the tractors must roll and operations must begin. If fuel shortages keep the tractors from running, there will be no crops. Farmers cannot wait a week or two weeks to receive their fuel. They must have it when they need it, or it is of no use to them.

And if farmers cannot plant their crops or if the harvest is ruined or cut back, then we will face a crisis in America which will make the recent rise in food prices look like unbridled prosperity. For example, a short corn and feed grain crop brought about by fuel shortages at the planting season in the next few weeks will send meat prices soaring beyond the worst nightmares of today's shoppers.

NATIONAL PROBLEM

This is not simply a regional problem or a situation facing one sector of the economy. It is a problem which concerns every American -- from the farmer in Kansas who wants to plant his crops to the housewife in New York City who wants a variety of products and reasonable prices at the supermarket.

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VOLUNTARY ALLOCATION PROGRAM

Today, Secretary Simon appeared before the senate Banking, Housing and Urban Development Committee and announced a program for the allocation of crude oil and refinery products.

I feel this program falls far short of meeting the crisis which confronts us. In fact, I would hardly call it a program. It is merely an exercise in the discredited and disproven tactic of "jawboning."

The farmers of America cannot burn voluntary guidelines and suggested priorities in their tractors. They must have fuel -- gasoline, diesel oil, and LP gas -- and they must have it at the right time. And that time is now.

Voluntary guidelines and threat or more stringent measures cannot guarantee the fuel or farmers need. A Washington bureaucracy cannot know whether farmers are receiving the supplies they need when they need them. And even if violations of the voluntary guidelines are detected, remedial action would come too late to do any good.

America's food supplies are too important to depend on a voluntary, bureaucratic fuel allocation plan. This plan needs more than a jawbone behind it. It requires strong teeth and a big stick to assure and require compliance.

MANDATORY CONTROLS REQUIRED

Perhaps a voluntary system would be adequate for other economic interests which can survive brief periods of fuel shortages. But farmers must have the protection and assurance of mandatory controls.

Congress has provided the authority for these controls, and it must be exercised if our Nation is to avoid one of the most widespread and tragic disasters in its history -- a real, nationwide food shortage.