



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE
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JANUARY 21, 1976

Recent news accounts of misuse of government funds by food stamp vendors has reinforced public cynicism about the entire food stamp program. It is perceived by many as another federal social program gone wild. That so many Americans should hold this view is unfortunate. For the food stamp program is a valuable -- indeed, necessary -- income and nutritional supplement for millions of needy Americans.

But even the strongest supporters of the program must recognize that fundamental reforms are urgently required to restore program integrity. Our goals for reform were well stated by President Ford in his State of the Union Message on Monday: "Let's give food stamps to those most in need. Let's not give any to those who don't need them."

I have introduced legislation which I believe meets these twin objectives. But even the most desirable reforms will fail unless administration of the program by the Department of Agriculture is improved.

Already, the Department has admitted that it paid at least \$260 million in food stamp benefits to persons who did not qualify or who qualified for less than they actually received. Other estimates put the waste at nearly \$800 million in improper payments to recipients.

Today, we are focusing on reports that government auditors have turned up nearly \$9 million in undeposited receipts after an audit of 18 businesses which sell food stamps to the public. Obviously, with over 14,000 vendors nationwide, the potential for more widespread abuse is immense.

More fundamentally, I fear that these latest revelations are indicative of continuing laxity in administration of the food stamp program by the Department. If the American people are to continue supporting necessary income and food assistance programs, they deserve to be assured that the programs are being well administered. In the case of food stamp vendor payments, the public deserves answers to several questions:

- 1) How many millions of dollars of taxpayers' money have been lost due to fraud or misuse of food stamp funds by vendors?
- 2) Why did it take the Department of Agriculture so long to uncover this scandal?
- 3) What steps is the Administration taking to uncover the causes of the vendor payment problem?
- 4) What is the Department doing to ensure that food stamp ~~payments~~ ^{receipts} will be properly accounted for in the future?
- 5) What does the Department propose to do to persons involved in misuse of food stamp receipts?
- 6) Does the Department recommend new legislation in this area to deter possible future misuse of food stamp monies?

I look forward to hearing the Department's responses to these and other questions.