

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF
CONGRESSMAN BOB DOLE (R-KANSAS)
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"Why has Secretary of Agriculture Freeman slapped a 'confidential' label on his Department's report covering the Billie Sol Estes cotton allotment fraud?" Congressman Bob Dole (R-Kansas) wants to know.

"Why has Mr. Freeman refused to make this document available to the Texas State Grand Jury which is now investigating the mysterious death of the Department of Agriculture employee who was checking into the Estes cotton scandal" Dole asked this week. "Texas courts have been denied access to pertinent Federal records throughout the Estes probe and thus have been seriously handicapped.

"I am shocked to learn that the full record of the cotton allotment case has been denied to Texas Attorney General Will Wilson by the Secretary on the grounds that it would be "improper" to release this document. Public confidence in Mr. Freeman will scarcely be restored by his offer to make available to the chief law enforcement officer of Texas only such parts of the record as the Secretary deems pertinent to the current investigation of the death of Henry Marshall, an ASCS official who was declared a suicide after his bullet-riddled body was found in a field nearly a year ago.

"The pathologist who examined Mr. Marshall's exhumed body reported he did not believe this was a case of suicide.

"Mr. Freeman could possibly be impeding justice by his refusal to permit the Texas Grand Jury to examine the full Estes cotton allotment file and decide for itself what information may or may not be pertinent to its investigation of Mr. Marshall's death.

"The hush-hush report apparently is the same one which was in the custody of a long-time career attorney of the Department of Agriculture, N. Battle Hales, until a few weeks ago when he was locked out of his office and denied further access to records relating to the Estes case. It apparently is the same report which was at that time placed in the protective custody of Jacob Puterbaugh, USDA political appointee and Mr. Freeman's former Minnesota Liquor Commissioner.

"What is there in this confidential cotton allotment report that a Grand Jury can't be permitted to see? What is this information that can be entrusted to Mr. Puterbaugh but not to the press or the public?

"Could it just possibly be that this document puts the finger, with names, dates and places, on the USDA political appointees who for months side-tracked the recommendations of the career administrators in connection with the now admittedly illegal Estes cotton allotments? Is Mr. Freeman protecting the public interest in keeping this report from public scrutiny or is he protecting some individuals who, in the public interest, should be exposed?

"The report itself will answer all of the questions I have raised. If Mr. Freeman wants to salvage even a shred of public confidence in his administration of the Department of Agriculture, he will release the full Estes cotton allotment report at once."