



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

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OPENING STATEMENT BY SENATOR BOB DOLE FOR HEARING ON FEDERALLY SUPPORTED FOOD PROGRAMS
HORTON, KANSAS, MONDAY, AUGUST 8, 1977.

Today is the first of three days of Senate hearings in six Kansas communities on the major federally supported food assistance programs. On behalf of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, this morning's opening session in Parsons was devoted to Food Stamps; the Extension Service Nutrition Education Program; and the Hot Meal Program for the Elderly. This afternoon I would like to continue by focusing on three other programs: Summer Food Service for Children; the Community Services Administration's Community Food and Nutrition Program; and the Head Start Program for Preschool Children.

Federally financed food programs are budgeted for over \$6.6 billion in the current fiscal year--up from a little over \$1 billion in 1970. So these programs are more than six times as big as they were seven years ago.

We members of Congress sit in Washington and crank out these programs with the best of intentions--but often without having a very good idea of how they fit into the existing activities of public and private agencies. And afterwards, we don't always watch too closely how they are actually working at the community level. It's one thing to talk about the impressive funding levels and the millions of beneficiaries. It's another to talk to the people who run the programs and those who are intended to benefit from them--to trace the federal dollars to their ultimate disposal and judge whether the good intentions are actually being fulfilled in a sensible and economical fashion.

Food Stamps

By far the biggest and most expensive of the federal food and nutrition programs is Food Stamps--the subject of our hearing in Parsons this morning. The Food Stamp Program has been subject to a great deal of public misunderstanding. Coupons can be purchased by eligible low-income individuals who are then able to exchange the stamps for food at less cost to themselves. The program is administered at the national level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; at the state and local levels by the welfare agencies.

The farm bill that will be before Congress for final action shortly after Labor Day would make a significant change in the program by eliminating the requirement that poor people pay cash for their allotment of stamps. In the past, the people who needed help the most--namely those without much money--have sometimes been unable to take advantage of the savings on food because they lacked the few dollars needed to obtain the stamps they were entitled to at the beginning of the month. Combined with a reduction in the monthly allotment of stamps, and other provisions that are expected to weed out the higher income people who have sometimes abused the food stamp program--I think the changes are desirable and will be an improvement.

Summer Food Service

The first of the programs we want to review this afternoon is the Summer Food Service for Children, which is administered by the USDA, and which provides cash assistance for nutritious meals for children in low-income families. We want to know whether the catering systems that are sometimes used to provide the meals are too expensive--and whether the assistance is reaching those children who need it most. Current child nutrition legislation, now on its way to a Senate-House Conference contains many provisions designed to eliminate the fraud and mismanagement that have plagued this program.

Community Food - Nutrition

Next on our agenda is the Community Food and Nutrition Program. Nutrition projects are funded through community action agencies, Indian tribal councils, migrant groups, and other agencies. Poverty and poor nutrition are grave problems in rural as well as urban areas, but the fact that the need population is spread over many miles makes it more difficult to reach these people with food assistance programs. If an elderly couple has to drive 20 miles for a free hot meal, the cost of gasoline might still be about \$3.00. So one of the questions we want to explore is whether our federal food programs are designed to give rural residents a reasonable chance to participate.

Head Start

The third program we'll be discussing this afternoon is Head Start. Launched in 1965 by the Office of Economic Opportunity (which is now renamed the Community Services Administration), Head Start is run by HEW at the federal level and by community based organizations and public school systems at the local level.

We want to know whether the money is reaching the people who need help--whether the Administration at the state and local level is efficient--whether any red tape can be cut away--whether the nutritional benefits can be enhanced--whether the impact at the local level is what Congress intended when the law was passed in the first place.

I welcome those of you who are here to testify. Food, nutrition, and health professionals; state, county and municipal officials; academic authorities from colleges and universities; and program recipients themselves can all help us understand what is being done and whether it can be done more effectively. Good nutrition is the concern of all Americans. Producers and consumers of food have a vital interest in what we learn here in Kansas this week.

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