

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE-LEAHY TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO ATTACK FOOD STAMP FRAUD

WASHINGTON -- Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.), along with Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), today announced that they plan to introduce legislation to deal with the most frequently cited problems of fraud and abuse in the food stamp program. The senators said that these changes would save approximately \$100 million a year in program costs.

"In this legislation, we attempt to address most of the complaints that have come to our attention through testimony in the Agriculture Committee," Dole said. "During a time when there is a scarcity of federal fiscal resources, it is to the advantage of our entire society -- and the taxpayer in particular -- to see that program benefits are targeted to those who are most needy within our population. We can do this by attempting to restore an image of integrity and dignity to the food stamp program, so that those who are really in need of food stamps are not ashamed to participate in the program."

Dole said the bill contains approximately 14 substantive changes in food stamp accountability procedures and eligibility requirements.

"One of the principal problems in the program has been the use of food stamps to purchase non-food items," he said. "Food stamps have been used to purchase everything from television sets to automobiles and drugs. One reason the stamps have been available for black market activities is that current policy allows easy and frequent replacement of lost or stolen stamps. Our bill deals with this problem by limiting the number of times that lost or stolen food stamps can be replaced.

"Another problem has been persons who obtain multiple benefits by claiming as an individual and also as a member of a household. We attack this problem by changing the definition of household in order to prevent a family from artificially splitting into two or more food stamp households in order to receive a greater amount of benefits.

"But perhaps most important, there are new directives in this law which will result in a permanent termination of benefits to individuals who are found to have engaged in repetitive fraud or misuse of stamps. The bill provides that any adjudication of fraud or abuse with respect to the use of stamps or authorization cards by either an administrative agency or a court will result in suspension from the program for a period of six months for the first offense, one year for the second offense, and permanent exclusion from the program for persons who have committed three such offenses. We believe that this will stop the 'revolving door' which allows individuals who abuse the program to continue receiving benefits.

"It is important to remember, however, that no matter how many improved procedures are developed to control fraud, those procedures cannot be effectively implemented without adequate personnel to supervise the administration of the program. Therefore, I will support expansion of the investigative resources of the Department of Agriculture to enable that department to more aggressively ferret out fraud. Currently there are approximately 75 investigators allotted nationwide to food stamp program cases. This number must be increased if we are to have effective supervision of this program."