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DOLE SAYS NETWORK TELEVISION STORY ON FOOD STAMP FRAUD INACCURATE

WASHINGTON -- Senior Senate Agriculture Committee member Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.) today expressed concern over an NBC News report on fraud in the food stamp program which aired last night in the Nightly News broadcast.

"This food stamp story represented less than thorough reporting," Dole said. "Facts were used without regard to their accuracy, and in effect only one side of the food stamp fraud story was told, leaving the viewing public with the impression that fraud within the system runs unchecked.

"One of my main concerns about this piece is that there was no attempt made to balance out the report by mentioning the changes that have occurred in the law since 1980 to correct abuses in the food stamp program, as well as efforts that Congress made this year in initiating further reforms," Dole said. "There was no mention of actions being taken by the Department of Justice, the FBI and the USDA inspector general's office to curtail large-scale criminal fraud in the program.

"Like others in Congress, I am cognizant of the need to seek reforms in the system, and I recognize that in the past clear abuses have taken place. However, I feel that great strides have been made in the last several years to stem abuses, and it is obvious to me that we are definitely progressing in this respect. The NBC report casts undeserved doubt on these reform efforts.

"A principal exhibit used by the network to make its case that theft in the program is rampant is a film of USDA employees stealing food stamps from a USDA mailroom. In fact, this film was taken about six years ago, and grew out of an isolated incident in which authorities suspected two employees of theft, caught them, fired them and prosecuted them. What was shown to the American public was an isolated incident, and these practices were eliminated years ago.

"Furthermore, in the area of illegal trafficking, certainly no responsible official examining the food stamp program has ever suggested that criminal activity is in the \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion realm, the figure given by NBC's source, a fraud investigator in Florida, and used as the basis for which the network states that 'crooks are making billions' off the program. The USDA inspector general has never hinted that food stamp trafficking or other illicit activities remotely approach this level.

"Most seriously, the report never mentioned that Congress enacted a battery of anti-fraud and anti-abuse provisions in 1980 that are now starting to take effect, added further anti-fraud provisions in the Reconciliation Act which the President signed several weeks ago, and that the Senate passed further stringent measures in June which should become law shortly.

"These reporting inaccuracies help perpetrate the myth that the food stamp program is out of control, and that millions in taxpayer dollars are being lost to fraud. This is one worthy federal program that deserves better treatment."