

NEW PROGRAMS FOR RURAL RENAISSANCE

1. Studies of rural communities have shown that many young people leave their communities because of a lack of community facilities. Congress has provided and will be providing Federal aid for community facilities and mass transit for large urban areas. The demonstration cities program would go even further. We ask that you pay similar attention to the problems of blighted rural areas and the slum pockets in our smaller towns and cities.

While the mass transit program will provide rapid transportation in the metropolitan areas and megalopolis complex on the east coast, our public transportation systems in rural areas is figuratively in the horse and buggy era. We urge Congress establish a small experimental program of aid to rural areas and small towns to help develop experimental public, cooperative, and nonprofit transportation systems for these areas. The minibus has been developed in the metropolitan areas with Federal aid, but no similar kind of experiments are going on in rural areas. One-third of the people over age 65—6 million older people now live in rural areas and towns of less than 5,000. Many of these people cannot or should not drive their own cars for economic, physical, or other reasons. Isolation is the plague of rural old age. These older people plus the youth of rural America cry out for public transportation. The youth need it also. We urge Congress to adopt an experimental rural and small town transportation program.

2. We urge that Congress go beyond providing water and sewer facilities for rural areas. Last year I appeared before this committee urging you to take the initiative in providing a community facilities program as a part of the 1965 Housing Act. As you all know, Senator Aiken took the initiative instead, with the resulting massive congressional support, passed the bill to provide aid for rural water and sewerage. Had the Aiken bill been a part of the 1965 Housing Act, perhaps those of us who lobbied so hard would not have had the difficult time in passing the housing bill which we had. Perhaps the new bill might do with some rural support.

This year I ask that the committee add to its omnibus community demonstration bill a program for aid to rural community facilities, over and above water and sewerage facilities. This program should include new low interest loans and grants to predominantly rural areas for community facilities such as police and fire facilities, street lighting, county clinics, and community centers.

I feel certain that there would be strong rural support from among those volunteers active in volunteer fire departments working for better fire and police services, smalltown merchants seeking better street lighting, and the youth and aged, and in fact people of all ages seeking recreation, education, and community programs in rural areas. We would suggest that grant provisions might be included similar to those available for urban community facilities. This program might also include provision for other community utilities, such as gaslines, so that small towns in rural areas might form cooperatives, public or nonprofit associations for piping gas into homes. Many rural communities have major gaslines passing through or near their areas, but the gas transmission companies do not want to retail the gas. This section could be achieved by amending the 1949 housing law or amending the rural communities facilities program enacted by Congress last year, known as the Aiken law.

The National Farmers Union supports the rural areas development district bill as essential to the implementation of these proposed programs.

The National Farmers Union convention recommended a continuation of the rural housing direct loan program of the Farmers Home Administration which the Bureau of the Budget continually seeks to eliminate, despite the strong action by this committee and Congress to continue the direct-loan program. We urge that the 1966 program, instead of being decreased by \$50 million to a proposed level of \$15 million, be kept at the past rate of \$65 million per year. We urge this committee to take a position opposing the Bureau of the Budget action to erode all of the direct loan housing programs.

We feel that the Farmers Home Administration and the new Department of Housing and Urban Development basically are attempting to do—and are doing—a good job with the tools they have. We urge, however, that a closer working relationship be established at all levels so that the small cities and towns are not forgotten in the gap between these two agencies.

We also feel that both Farmers Home Administration and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have done excellent pioneering in the field of