STATEMENT OF HON. THOMAS G. ABERNETHY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I welcome the opportunity to present to the Committee my views concerning the effect which the enactment of H. R. 4769 would have on farmers and on farm workers, particularly in Mississippi.

The crucially important fact relating to the issue as it involves the welfare of farm workers in Mississippi is the precipitous decline in farm worker employment in the State. This has created substantial unemployment among farm workers with associated problems of poverty and welfare.

This development has resulted in an out-migration of farm workers from rural areas. Many such people have ended up in urban slums in northern cities.

The scale of the reduction in farm labor employment in Mississippi is indicated by the following table.

HIRED FARMWORKER EMPLOYMENT IN MISSISSIPPI

	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
January	18,000	17,000	19,000	16,000	15,000
February	26,000	26,000	29,000	22,000	17,000
March	43,000	40,000	37,000	38,000	29,000
April	71,000	66,000	52,000	47,000	36,000
May	98,000	84,000	89,000	64,000	44,000
June	82,000	74,000	84,000	61,000	45,000
July	45,000	60,000	52,000	46,000	----------
August	61,000	56,000	47,000	44,000	----------
September	149,000	120,000	105,000	83,000	----------
October	114,000	100,000	102,000	78,000	----------
November	48,000	36,000	33,000	32,000	----------
December	20,000	19,000	16,000	13,000	----------
Annual average	65,000	58,000	55,000	45,000	----------

Source: "Farm Labor" Reports, USDA.

The sharp downward trend in farm worker employment will be noted. The reduction in the first six months of 1967 is particularly acute. Farm worker employment was down 25% below the same months in 1966. The situation is comparable in other farming areas of the nation.

This represents primarily the impact of the extension of minimum wage legislation to farm workers. Unfortunately the full impact of the minimum wage legislation on farm worker employment has not yet been felt. As the minimum wage goes to $1.15 next year and $1.30 in 1969, further adverse consequences on the employment of farm workers is inevitable.

The effect on the people so disemployed is disastrous. Unfortunately most such disemployed workers have few qualifications which enable them to find employment elsewhere or in other occupations.

The relationship between the above recital of the factual situation in Mississippi and H.R. 4769 is this: The enactment of H.R. 4769 would create an additional incentive for farmers to substitute capital for labor by the purchase of labor saving equipment. This, of course, will also be the situation in other farm states.

Mechanization of farming operations is not an independent process. The rate of mechanization depends upon the outlook with respect to labor costs and labor conflict. Farmers do not invest capital in mechanization—and it is an extremely expensive change for farmers who are chronically short of capital to make—unless they conclude that the sum total of the factors affecting their future outlook compel them to do so.

Farmers in Mississippi have by no means exhausted the changes they can make in response to a difficult labor situation. The incentive for them to change their farming operations by investing in labor saving equipment and other adjustments that would be stimulated by the enactment of H.R. 4769 would result in a substantially greater disemployment of farm workers than would otherwise be the case. This incentive would be established even where no immediate efforts to unionize farm workers were made as a result of the enactment of H.R. 4769. Farmers would anticipate trouble ahead and would adjust their plans and operations to be in the best possible situation to deal with the problem as it may develop.

In analyzing the impact of the proposed extension of the National Labor Relations Act to agriculture, it is important to understand the drastic effect