

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
AT THE HEARING OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

TIFTON, GEORGIA

JULY 9, 1971

I am delighted that the Rural Development Subcommittee is today holding hearings in Georgia's Rural Development Center. I am excited by what I see here. I am excited by the establishment of this Center, which is designed to focus the whole range of university and Extension resources on rural development.

I have always felt that the resources of our land grant colleges and our Extension Service could be brought into better coordination -- to better focus on the improvement and development of our rural areas.

It strikes me that the folks at the Rural Development Center are trying to do the same type of thing in Georgia that we in the Rural Development Subcommittee are trying to do in Washington. As Chairman of the Subcommittee, I feel that we must attempt not only to develop and initiate new legislation to improve the Nation's rural areas, we must attempt to coordinate and sharpen the focus of the myriad of good programs which are already on the books.

It is reassuring to note that one State, Georgia, has already undertaken the task of better utilizing the resources of its university system and its Extension Service to promote rural development.

It amazes me that a country with resources as great as ours should allow many of its rural areas to become impoverished areas devoid of economic vitality. It is amazing that we allow our rural population to pile helter-skelter into our over-congested cities. Our problem has been the lack of national will and a purpose to do what is necessary to obtain balanced growth. Our problem has been the lack of a policy which would encourage a rational distribution of our Nation's population.

On the contrary, it appears that we have had a conscious national policy of stripping the Nation's countryside of its people and its resources and pushing them into the Nation's metropolises. For many years some of the Nation's top economists and policy makers felt that the solution to the Nation's "farm problem" was to remove our surplus of farmers from the land and force them into the cities. Certainly, this is exactly what such Federal programs as the Soil Bank did.

However, the Subcommittee saw in Alabama yesterday, and in Georgia this morning, the results of a positive national policy combined with determined local citizens. In Decatur, Alabama, we saw the results of a government policy designed to reclaim the wasted natural and human resources of the depressed area that was the Tennessee Valley. We saw a different kind of Tennessee Valley yesterday. We saw an area which under the stimulus of that landmark program of Federal, State, and local cooperation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, has become one of the most flourishing and progressive parts of the Nation.

This morning in Alma, Georgia, we saw a startling example of what determination on the part of local citizens can accomplish. We saw a town which a few short years ago was faced with a choice of fighting for survival or slow death. The citizens of Alma and Bacon County realized that the decline of the county's farm economy and the reduction of the town's tourist income because of the construction of an interstate highway through another part of the State would mean a slow withering away of the area's economic viability. The citizens of Alma and Bacon County, Georgia decided to fight. They went out and successfully fought for a Model City grant, and they are still fighting for every Federal dollar that is available. But the real story of Alma, Georgia, lies not in the Federal dollars that it is getting, but in the use that it is making of them. I just wish that every dollar spent by our Federal government had as much effect as the dollars being spent in Alma, Georgia.

But we are conducting a hearing here today not that I may tell you folks my ideas about rural development, but that I may learn what Georgia is doing to develop its rural areas and so that the Subcommittee may learn something that can be applied on a nationwide basis.

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