



Congresswoman
Rosa L. DeLauro

Press Release

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DeLauro Opening Statement at Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing

Washington, D.C. – Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro (Conn.-3), chairwoman of the House Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Appropriations Subcommittee, delivered the following opening statement during a subcommittee hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at which Agriculture Secretary Edward Schafer testified.

Below is the text of her statement, as prepared for delivery.

The hearing is called to order.

Good morning and I want to welcome everyone, particularly our panelist, Secretary Schafer, who I met yesterday in advance of today's hearing. Secretary Schafer, congratulations and good luck: I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

I am pleased again to welcome the ranking member, Mr. Kingston, as we begin these hearings on the FY08 Agriculture Appropriations bill.

I have said before that the issues we confront on this subcommittee speak to the core responsibilities of the Federal government. The work we do here, affects people's everyday lives. Keeping the country safe and healthy. Preserving and strengthening our rural, traditional communities. Thinking about the problems, like energy, on the horizon, not just today.

I believe the USDA has a great opportunity to meet those obligations to its citizens -- consumers who want safe drugs and food, farmers who rely on fair, functioning markets, children who need healthy food to meet their full potential, and rural communities that need new opportunities to thrive.

But in order to achieve these goals, the agency must make sure its actions keep up with its words. And, I am afraid that with the budget we have before us today, that may not be possible. With

gross spending for all USDA programs in our bill -- before offsets -- cut by \$402 million below 2008, we are going in the wrong direction. The WIC Program, Rural Development, Conservation and Research: ALL will encounter major shortfalls.

With these trends in mind, I want to touch on a few areas of concern within this budget.

Country of Origin Labeling continues to be a problem and I am afraid that its implementation is not moving in an effective or timely manner. If we are in fact facing delays with COOL, we must know why, and exactly how the USDA plans to get back on track. Neither this subcommittee nor the American people should be willing to stay patient and trust the administration, considering the Department's past record on COOL. I hate to say: the latest, proposed User Fees seem to be more of the same, just another delaying tactic.

Animal ID is also moving far too slowly. We have already made a significant investment, \$118 million, in this initiative, yet the program will not meet its January 2009 goal to have all registrations complete. The previous secretary indicated the program should be made mandatory and then did the opposite. I have asked for clear cost estimates and then received only vague answers. No one should expect a blank check from this subcommittee.

In addition, I am concerned that your budget undermines the priorities this administration has outlined in the new Farm Bill. With the Conservation title, for example, this administration has proposed expanding it for the next five years, yet this budget proposal includes significant cuts.

The list goes on -- examples of a budget that flies in the face of the farm bill, the administration's rhetoric, and our nation's priorities. Some nutrition programs like CSFP, currently serving 473,000 are zeroed out, while others like WIC are both short-funded and allow for no increase in participation despite current trends. Rural development programs are short funded as well, eliminating funds entirely for community facility grants and rural business enterprise and opportunity programs.

And so, Mr. Secretary, I believe we have room for improvement in many areas. Thank you again for being here today. I look forward to asking you about these concerns and others. I thank you in advance for working with us today and in the days to come. I know that you were not the one in charge of putting this budget together, but regardless, you are in charge now, and must carry it out.

Ultimately, our appropriations reflect our priorities as a nation. We have big goals and it is the details -- the budget and the basics we are discussing here today -- that get us there. We have a responsibility to get it right.

With that, I would like to yield my time. Thank you.

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