

Senator Roberts: Ag Committee Holds Farm Bill Hearing on Rural Development and Energy

At a hearing of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, U.S. Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), the Committee's ranking member, today examined policies critical to rural communities and called out the Obama administration for dusting off tired budget proposals that target crop insurance, the most important safety net for producers.

The following are Senator Roberts' prepared remarks:

“Determining the needs of our farmers, ranchers, and rural residents and how we can best serve those needs in the most effective and efficient manner is the primary goal of this committee.

“Unfortunately, our current budget situation leaves us with little room for error. So in making policy decisions on what’s best for rural Americans, we will rely heavily on our witnesses to tell us what programs are working, what programs are not working, and how we can make smarter decisions here in Washington that will provide folks around the country with the tools they need to grow our rural economies in a smart, viable, and lasting way.

“Let me just highlight for a moment some achievements of my home state of Kansas. We have a solid group of leaders who are spending a lot of time, resources, and talent on solutions for growing our rural economies.

“I commend those leaders like the Kansas Farm Bureau, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, K-State’s Advance Manufacturing Institute, as well as the Rural Policy Research Institute for the innovative thinking and commitment to this effort.

“I’m glad we have Mr. Fluharty from the Rural Policy Research Institute to tell us about these projects and how they are improving the lives and economies of rural Kansans.

“With that in mind, Madame Chairwoman, I ask unanimous consent for written testimony submitted by the Kansas Farm Bureau to be included in the official record.

“I am also pleased to welcome Bill Greving and his wife Diana from Prairie View, Kansas. Bill is a sorghum and wheat farmer and will share his experiences working with local ethanol facilities both on supplying sorghum and utilization of the DDGs (Dried Distillers Grain) for his cattle.

“I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the results from these investments and what each of you sees as the future in renewable energy. I am concerned that after four years some of these programs were just implemented within the last year. We need to make sure we are taking into consideration the complexity of the energy programs. And it’s not just energy – we are discussing this issue in multiple titles – the complexity of programs and the ability of USDA to deliver the programs effectively and for producers to understand their options.

“We also have a responsibility to craft the right types of programs to facilitate new markets without adversely affecting exiting markets or duplicating actions of other government agencies.

“Hopefully we can use all of this good insight from our panel of witnesses today as we move forward with Farm Bill discussions.

“I appreciate very much Secretary Vilsack taking his valuable time to testify this morning. While we’re here to discuss other matters, I’d be remiss if I didn’t comment about the President’s budget announcement this week.

“I was disappointed to see, yet again I might add, a proposal that cuts nearly \$8 billion out of the crop insurance program. This is on top of the \$6 billion cut from the previous SRA.

“What baffles me is that instead of looking for new and innovative ways to protect producers as well as taxpayers, the President’s budget dusts off old policy proposals that Congress has continually rejected.

“Furthermore, with roughly 80 percent of agriculture’s budget tied to nutrition programs, the President’s proposal cannot find one dollar of savings from increased efficiencies.

“Thankfully this committee is about to start a process where we will make the necessary policy decisions for the

future instead of the President and OMB.”