

As Prepared

OPENING REMARKS
Chairman Robert Aderholt
Agriculture Subcommittee Markup
May 20, 2014

Before you this morning is the Chairman's mark for the FY 15 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

The Subcommittee's discretionary 302(b) allocation is \$20.88 billion. This bill meets that allocation. Discretionary spending in this bill is equal to the FY 14 enacted level.

When the Subcommittee began the FY 15 appropriation process, I asked my colleagues to keep in mind three guiding principles. They were: (1) Ensuring the Proper Use of Funds through Robust Oversight; (2) Ensuring the Appropriate Level of Regulation to Protect Producers and the Public; and, (3) Ensuring Funding is Targeted to Vital Programs. These three principles guided us from the first review of the President's budget request to the content of the bill in front of you. This basic framework helped us set priorities during the 10 budget and oversight hearings this year, which covered all of USDA's mission areas, as well as the Food and Drug Administration and Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

They also formed a framework for us to consider the many bill and report requests we received from our colleagues. I'm pleased to report that interest in this bill is higher than ever. We received more than 3,900 requests from 326 Members to support, deny, or amend funding levels in the numerous accounts in the bill and to include new bill or report language. We have tried to address these requests in a bipartisan manner by providing programmatic funding or by including language in the bill or report in accordance with House rules. As such, there are no earmarks in this bill.

There are two particular issues I would like to mention this morning. First, let me bring to your attention that this bill allocates GSA rent and Department of Homeland Security costs to USDA's individual agencies. In the past, we have provided funding for these costs in one, consolidated account. We believe that by decentralizing rent and security costs, USDA's agencies will be motivated to control costs, thus providing savings.

Second, this bill includes language that provides schools an opportunity to apply for a waiver if they are experiencing financial difficulty meeting the nutrition standards created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. As background, Congress included similar language in the FY 14 conference report. The language directed USDA to establish a waiver process that gives schools the flexibility they are requesting. This was language that received agreement from the majority and minority of both the House and Senate. The Secretary of Agriculture subsequently informed the House and Senate that he did not have the authority to implement waivers. We took the next logical step in this bill by providing him the legal authority to grant such waivers.

While I and my colleagues are concerned about the national problems brought on by childhood obesity, I also want to be sensitive to the challenges of local school districts. I continually hear from my schools in Alabama about the challenges and costs they are facing and their desperation for flexibility and relief so that they can operate a program serving healthy foods the kids will eat. I would bet many of you are hearing similar concerns from your schools as well. If you are not, then this waiver process will have no impact on how your schools are operating. If your schools are successfully implementing the nutrition standards and operating in

the black, they would not qualify for or need a waiver. However, for schools suffering economic hardship and needing more time to implement and adjust to the new standards, this waiver gives them that flexibility schools are asking us to provide.

It is a pleasure to present to you a bill that will impact every American, every day of the year. We support America's farmers and ranchers, who are vital to our Nation's economy and our health and well-being. We are blessed with such a diverse and plentiful food supply that is partly made possible through programs in the bill which assist farmers and ranchers across the country. We support those at home in need with food and housing and provide rural businesses with low-interest loans and grants to help them sustain local economies. We help others around the world who face starvation and malnutrition. We support research and development in agriculture to improve productivity and stability. We support the oversight of commodity markets, providing confidence for businesses, traders, investors, and the public. We support a safe food supply and safe and effective drugs and devices. We are fortunate that as a Nation we can support these vital programs.