

out not by place of residence. "With only a third of this nation's population, nearly half the nation's poor are living in rural America," Cochran said.

• In reviewing discrimination in education, the study focuses on educational problems in major cities, failing to mention that according to a 1974 Census survey nearly twice as many rural as urban dwellers are illiterate.

• The report on justice is dominated by accounts of misconduct by city policemen, while the problems of rural police forces, where many law officials are poorly trained, are ignored.

• The word "rural" appears in the report only in connection with the difficulty some rural women have in obtaining abortions.

The report was written, Cochran concluded, "almost as if rural areas exist in the idyllic past where the security of a small community makes fairness, justice and opportunity assumed."

USDA Watch

At first the news seemed encouraging. A one-year, \$90,000 demonstration study, said an official release from the Department of Agriculture, would assess "the transportation needs for moving both freight and passengers in rural Oklahoma. Both users and rural residents will have a chance to express their views as the project develops," the agency promised.

We had no doubt what views those rural Oklahomans would express. They and other rural Americans have been unable for a generation to beg, borrow or hitch a ride with any federal agency willing to take their transportation problems seriously. So the USDA project struck us as hopeful, and we called to tell them so—and also to learn more details. We should have known better.

"The project has been placed in limbo," said John Nicholas, an agency information officer. "The project is dead; it would take a miracle to resurrect it." Can't you hear that whistle down the way, on the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe?

Talk in the Carter administration about dismantling key parts of the USDA has prompted Rural America and other organizations to rush to the department's support. In a recent statement, 32 organizations praised the USDA as "the primary deliverer of services to rural America," and added: "We oppose transferring major functions of the USDA to other departments and agencies whose orientation and sympathies make them much less qualified than the Department of Agriculture to implement these programs in rural areas."

Meanwhile, Senator Herman Talmadge, chairman of the Senate Agriculture committee, is sounding a similar note. Government

Rural Elderly Have Just Begun to Fight

by Richard J. Margolis

Congress's latest gesture to the elderly—the Older Americans Act—has already passed the House and is awaiting passage in the Senate. The two versions differ here and there, but they have much in common: both envision spending about a half-billion dollars annually on services to elderly people; and neither goes far enough in redressing the rural inequities that have plagued this omnibus program since its inception in 1965.

Still, the rural elderly chalked up one or two minor victories this time around, in itself something of a political miracle, since Rural America was virtually the only organization extant working on the Hill in behalf of the rural aged.

The experience convinced us at Rural America of the urgent need for a Rural Elderly Council, a group that can be a voice for what has too long been a silent constituency. (Anyone can join the Rural Elderly Council, even the young.)

But back to the Older Americans Act. What it mainly does is pay for services to elderly Americans that they cannot other-

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wise obtain. "Nutrition" programs—a euphemism for keeping people from starving—account for more than half the total funds; the rest of the money goes for transportation assistance, senior community centers, legal aid, jobs and various social services.

In each of these categories rural people have regularly been getting short-changed—in part because the money is funnelled from Washington to some 560 different "area agencies" across the country, and most of these are dominated by city people or suburbanites; in part, too, because Congress has never summoned the courage to impose a reasonable rural-urban allocation formula, one that would reflect true elderly population ratios.

The upshot can be quickly summarized: while the rural elderly make up 31 percent of the national elderly population, they have been getting only ten percent of the federal dollars.

But things are worse than they seem: the need for elderly services in rural America is disproportionately great. For example, The rural aged are twice as likely to be poor as are the metropolitan aged; they are five times as likely to occupy substandard housing; they are six times as likely to live in what the Feds have blandly designated "medically underserved areas."

It would be helpful here to mention some figures, rural vs. non-rural, bearing on programs funded under the Older Americans Act. Helpful but impossible, because the Office of the Aging, which is responsible for administering the program, claims it has not the slightest idea what the rural-urban dollar breakdown might be.

Moreover, the agency has been advised in a report it paid for that "Geographic information is not generally available or

information may be collected unless it is germane to the management of programs," and "Geographic information on program beneficiaries is generally not considered directly relevant to the effective administration of most federal programs."

That officials in the Office of Aging claim to believe such hogwash testifies to their comatose state when in the presence of rural people. They suffer from galloping metropollyanna, a disease that in Washington has reached near-epidemic proportions.

As for those victories on the Hill: for openers, we helped persuade Congress to order the Office of Aging to attempt some research on the rural elderly, maybe even to start counting them. For seconds, certain approved amendments will make it easier for rural elderly people to get community centers and to take advantage of regular services, like Meals on Wheels, even if they happen to live far from the superhighway.

Senator Hathaway, the Democrat from Auburn, Maine, was particularly helpful. He is 54.

...Leahy Forum Raps Research

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service at USDA, said his department cannot fulfill the many requests from rural researchers for data on rural conditions. "This represents a major gap in our rural development research capability," he said.

"In my home state," Sen. Leahy added, "there is no information on land ownership, no information on poverty." He also questioned the wisdom of the administration's decision to drop Title V from the budget.

"It is a year of a tight budget," Cutler replied, "and exploratory or experimental programs tend to be sacrificed. We come back to the traditional programs."

Following the sessions, Leahy promised to "actively promote" rural development research. He said it was "up to Congress" to put through reforms of USDA research practices.

The hearings were organized chiefly by

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Meanwhile, Senator Herman Talmadge, chairman of the Senate Agriculture committee, is sounding a similar note. Government reorganizers, he warned recently, are bent on turning the USDA into "little more than an empty shell."

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Moreover, the agency has been advised in a report it paid for that "Geographic information is not generally available or collected by Federal agencies and departments." That is humbug, of course, but the report babbles on: "... the Office of Management and Budget has ruled that no

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The hearings were organized chiefly by Fred Schmidt, a sociology professor at the University of Vermont, and his staff. Schmidt is a board member of Rural America.