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FOR RELEASE: 10 February 1977

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FROM: Kika de la Garza

Washington, D C

AN ACTIVE FARMER now occupies the position of Secretary of the U S Department of Agriculture, the first time that has happened in 20 years. Secretary Bob Bergland of Minnesota had completed three terms in the House of Representatives when President Carter named him Secretary of Agriculture. He was a member of the House Agriculture Committee and I have often worked closely with him on farm matters of mutual concern to the people we represent. And I look forward to continued cooperation in his new job. It is significant that in the Senate committee confirmation hearings Mr Bergland was given high marks by a number of his congressional colleagues for his knowledge of agriculture, his good judgment and his ability to bring together the interests of farm and city dwellers.

His policies as Secretary of Agriculture were not deeply explored during the confirmation hearings, but he did give indications of his attitude on some matters of special interest to South Texans. He said he expects there will be an emergency farm bill early in this session of Congress, followed by more comprehensive legislation later in the year. He thinks a "long-range policy" on sugar is essential -- and he is certainly right about that. He favors the devison of a national conservation strategy which would continue to include an ACP program with "long-range policies." He sees the need for a clearer set of priorities in U S agricultural research. He plans to revoke the previous Secretary's order on food stamp program revisions and rely on reform legislation in Congress rather than on administrative remedies. If, he said, there are people on the food stamp rolls "who drive two cars" they should be dropped. He believes quarterly adjustments on manufacturing milk supports proper and workable.

Quotable quotes from the new Secretary of Agriculture:

*"I will not recommend policies that put the Government back into the business of owning grain. We should keep market-oriented programs."

*"The ever-normal granary is still a sound idea."

*"A food policy that leaves things to chance suggests that we must be prepared to accept boom and bust, and I'm not for that."

*"I have great faith in the capacity of the farmer-elected committee system (in ASCS) to run programs. The farmers have extremely good judgment. The decisions are made by people who know local circumstances."

*"I've farmed all my life. I'm trained in agriculture. I spent seven years in the USDA and six years on the House Agriculture Committee. I understand the industry. I would rather be in there with all the risks and with all the discomforts it'll cause than be on the outside criticizing someone else."

That's our new man in the Agriculture Department. He is important to our area.

* * *

MY COMMITTEE WORK has increased with my appointment to the House Committee on International Relations. I welcome the assignment because our location on the border between the U S and Mexico makes international relations especially significant to South Texans. I consider myself fortunate that I can serve on three committees of great importance to our area, the other two being Agriculture and Merchant Marine and Fisheries. Also, House Speaker Tip O'Neill has appointed me to the Select Committee on Narcotics, which is charged with investigating drug abuse and the international movement of illegal narcotics.

* * *

FIVE BOOKS about the Valley have been added to the library in my Washington office, thanks to Mrs Lucy Wallace, Mission author and indefatigable booster of our area. The five: "She came to the Valley" by Dr Cleo Dawson, "The Incredible City" by Lucy Wallace. "The Citrus Cook Book" by Lavina Bright, "History of Lower Rio Grande Valley" by Ann McGee and Laurier MacDonald and "Gift of the Rio" by several Valley writers.

They are a valuable addition to my Washington office and will help us to spread the good word about South Texas in these parts.

* * *

POTOMAC WALK: Through the years many persons have tried to walk across the waters of Washington's Potomac river which is the boundary line between Virginia and the District of Columbia. The river's good for boating but kind of risky for swimming. Alas, I finally walked on it -- not of course all the way across, but I walked -- and the fact that the river was frozen helped a bit.

Somebody who really enjoyed the ice was Angela. She is really quite a good skater and had a great time on the river, which is an unusual treat since the river rarely freezes over.

So from swimming in the Rio Grande to walking on the Potomac we've come a long way, baby!

* * *

VISITORS FROM HOME: Visiting my office from home this week were Mr Al Cisneros, Mr and Mrs Hershall Rogers, Mr Fred Rusteberg of Brownsville; Mr Frank M Gonzalez of Donna, now living in Washington D C; Mr George Labar Jr, Mr T H Morrison Jr of Harlingen; Mr Jim B Hensley, Mr Dwade King of McAllen; Mr Paul McCord of San Benito; and Mr Leo Garza Jr of San Juan.

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