

ADDRESS BY SENATOR STROM THURMOND (D-SC) at REA MEETING  
NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA, NOON, OCTOBER 22, 1955

Today I would like to review for you some of the major legislative accomplishments of the 1st Session of the 84th Congress. Before doing this, however, I want to say a few words about <sup>an</sup> event which took place 20 years ago and which has had more profound effects upon the economic and social history of our nation than almost any other single act. I am speaking of the executive order issued on May 11, 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt establishing the Rural Electrification Administration.

A whole generation has grown to manhood since that historic day. The conditions and the circumstances of the times are enshrouded in the mists of the past to many Americans. It is difficult now to conceive of the tremendous economic and social forces which created the necessity for REA. But in those days, nightfall left the rural sections of our nation blanketed in darkness. Millions of Americans relied solely upon flickering kerosene lamps and battery flashlights for all activities after the sun went down. The farmer worked from sun up to sun down, and his labors were hard. There were no electric pumps, no running water, no dependable refrigeration, and few -- if any -- labor-saving devices.

Aside from manpower and animal power, the great majority of America's farmers relied for outside sources of energy upon the winds and upon uncertain, sputtering gasoline engines. The amount of work that went into America's food

and fiber was high, and productivity per man-hour was low.

The nation itself was in the throes of a depression. Millions were unemployed and farm prices were hitting all-time lows. Our land was blanketed by a feeling of hopelessness that reached into every home and farm.

At that time, only 1 out of every 10 rural homes in the United States had electricity. Today -- 20 years after the establishment of the REA -- more than 90 per cent of our rural homes enjoy the benefits of electricity. In South Carolina less than 3 rural homes in every 100 had electric power in 1935. Today, 88 per cent have it.

Nationally, the REA serves more than 4 million consumers. In South Carolina, it provides electricity for more than 80,000 rural homes.

Since 1935, more than 3 billion dollars has been loaned to more than 1,000 borrowing co-operatives. To this date, there have been only two foreclosures, costing the government approximately \$40,000. In the meantime, \$376 million of the principal loans has been repaid, along with \$192 million more in interest. Truly, this program has been amazingly successful.

The real measure of success, however, is not to be found in statistics alone. Rather, it is to be found in the benefits that have come to the homes of millions of REA consumers, causing a virtual revolution in farm life. And, it does not even stop here; for, this revolution has had far-reaching effects throughout the national economy.

I understand that studies have been made which indicate that for every \$1.00 which has been spent in building the REA

distribution system \$8 is spent for equipment by the farmers whose homes are electrified. This has meant business for retail and wholesale appliance distributors. It has meant employment and profits in the manufacturing industries and for the transportation companies. It has meant that the producers of the raw materials have likewise shared in the expanding economic prosperity which has resulted from the REA program.

It has lifted many burdens from the shoulders of our hardworking farm families. Today these families -- which form the backbone of our economy -- have electric lights to replace kerosene lamps in their homes and schools; they have electric power to replace muscle power in much of their labors; and - I am glad to say - a great many of our farm families now enjoy the luxuries and conveniences of radio, television, washing machines, refrigeration and food freezers, and many of our other modern appliances which make life more comfortable and enjoyable.

I know of no agency of the federal government which has made a larger contribution to more people who really deserve such a contribution than has the REA during the past 2 decades.

I am proud that I had the privilege of being a member of the State legislative committee which wrote the first REA law for South Carolina. I only hope that I will be able to help write other legislation in Washington that will bring such immeasurable benefits to our farm population.

THE END