

COMMENTS OF MIKE NERUDA
Deputy Under Secretary
For Operations and Management
Rural Development

Good morning everyone. I see a lot of familiar faces, going back many years in the room, and it's always a pleasure. I didn't know that we were making this look like a Hill hearing, though, but I guess that's the way it works. I first went over to Jefferson Auditorium - - my mind said, oh, Jefferson Auditorium and they were having a police convention. I think that was the wrong place to be this morning, (laughter) so I'm glad that we're in a little different location and glad to see all the folks that came out for this public event.

I couldn't be more pleased that this provision was put in the Farm Bill. I am a strong proponent for high-speed Internet access and I think that rural America must have this if they're going to be a viable entity as we go into this new century. I compare it a lot with what we were able to do in rural America with telephone and telegraph in the 20's and 30's. The problem is we don't always have a lot of champions on this. A lot of people see it as luxury as opposed to a necessity. And it is a necessity in many rural areas. It means jobs. It means more access to everything about us in our modern American society. I'm just please that USDA is a part of this program.

I also want to say how lucky we are to have Hilda as Administrator for RUS. Her aggressiveness in terms of selling our programs and getting the work out is just - - for an administrator like me, it's just a marvelous thing to have Hilda in place. And I also want to thank Bobbie Purcell for her efforts in this, because this is going to be her program.

But we are moving along with the Farm Bill and actually I need to move along here this morning because I need to look at what the appropriators did yesterday. I just got some sheets on that and I'm anxious to see what each of the line items that they put in there are. So it looks like a tad bit different than what the President requested, so I'm anxious to see what the lines say on that.