

Editorial

FmHA loans "too cheap to scrap"

The Farmers Home Administration plays a major role in Nebraska's rural economy. Without it, more than 10,000 farms in this state probably could not have obtained loans. A large portion of those farms probably would have gone bankrupt.

Since 1935, the FmHA has been the last resort for farmers everywhere in the United States. When farmers couldn't get loans anywhere else, the FmHA was, and is, there.

Almost all of the loans made to

farmer by the FmHA have been repaid, according to the Sept. 10 issue of Newsweek.

Of Nebraska's about 10,000 borrowers, 28 percent are behind in their payments, said Frank Marsh, state director of FmHA.

The FmHA is one of the best and most enduring of the New Deal programs. It has saved thousands of farms.

In 1972, Congress added the responsibility of stimulating the non-farm rural economy to the FmHA. According to Marsh, the

FmHA has four sectors: the farmer program — the biggest sector — handles farm loans; the rural housing division; community programs and business and industry.

In Nebraska, Marsh said, the business and industry sector has been combined with the community sector. The business sector of FmHA guarantees loans to businesses starting up in towns of 50,000 or less.

Although the farmer and community programs are essential to Nebraska's agricultural economy,

the business program isn't right now.

Nebraska's FmHA has only 24 business loans. The Small Business Administration makes all loans less than \$500,000. In Nebraska's rural economy, not many businesses need more than \$500,000.

But the program, as a whole, should not be scrapped.

Estimates by the House Agriculture Committee show that the loans to rural industries guaranteed by the FmHA saved or created

273,134 rural jobs from 1974 to 1982, at about \$33 a job. That's a cheap way to create jobs — too cheap to scrap.

Even if the rural economy is improving, as the Reagan Administration claims, the need for the loan program may arise again. The FmHA has tightened the lending process to prevent bad loans, and if there is no need for the loan guarantees, the money is still in the U.S. Treasury — a no-risk, high-gain proposition if ever there was one.

Catholic clergy break church-state barrier

At some point during this long summer, the "wall of separation" between church and state became a battleground. Not the least well-armed of the contenders were the Catholic hierarchy assembled under the anti-abortion banner.

First we had New York Archbishop John J. O'Connor saying

Ellen Goodman

that he didn't "see how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion." In tandem, Bishop James W. Malone, the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that Catholics couldn't draw a line between "personal morality and public policy." They were both taking special aim at Catholic politicians of the Cuomo-Ferraro stripe who are "personally opposed to abortion but . . ."

Then last week, 18 New England bishops signed a statement that put two issues at the top of their moral/political agenda. These things were to be considered by voters above all others: abortion and nuclear war.

To the amateur observer this might have suggested that the Catholic church is splitting its ticket, since Reagan is seen as more sensitive to the unborn, while Mondale is regarded as more sensitive to the born. But the bishops said that the abortion issue comes first because: "While nuclear holocaust is a future possibility, the holocaust of abortion is a present reality." Presumably



SO MANY CANDIDATES CLAIMED GOD WAS ON THEIR SIDE I GUESS HE FELT OBLIGATED TO REGISTER...

they will allot nuclear war prime time during the nuclear winter.

Frankly, I am not one of those who believe that every clerical collar should come with a muzzle. Clergy have every right to speak on moral issues. They even have the right to endorse legislation and candidates. But when religious leaders start to talk like lobbyists and politicians, the public has to judge them as they would any other public-interest group, like The Sierra Club or the National Rifle Association or the National Abortion Rights Action League.

At some point, we are no longer getting a sermon but a mass mail-

ing. We are no longer a respectful congregation but a skeptical constituency. It's altogether appropriate to deal with the lobby this way, to check their facts, to ask whom they represent and whether the public policy they support is the best way to deal with the issue.

The bishops imply, for example, that the "facts" on which they rest their political case against abortion — that the fetus is a person and that abortion is therefore murder — are universally accepted within the Catholic church. But Catholic theologians are still arguing about when the fetus becomes a person. Before

the 18th century, the Church refused to baptize aborted fetuses because they were not viewed as human.

The question of whom exactly the bishops represent — beyond other bishops — is also a bit murky. They do not speak for 53 million American Catholics. Catholics share the same conflicts and attitudes toward abortion as the rest of Americans. Less than 20 percent of them agree with the bishops' support of a ban on all abortion. Indeed, at least in Massachusetts, Catholic women have abortions at the same rate as women of other religions.

One of the things that may

have prompted the hierarchy into electioneering is the public image of pro-choice Catholic politicians, especially Geraldine Ferraro. As Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice says, "Ferraro is such a visible sign of the Church's inability to control the Catholic people. Here is a woman on the front page every day who doesn't agree with them and goes about the business of being a Catholic."

But if the bishops prefer to think of themselves as representing God or His will, we get into even deeper religious/political trenches. There has been no divine revelation on, say, the Hyde Amendment. It is perfectly legitimate for any citizen, including Catholics with deep qualms about the morality of abortion, to argue over "pro-life" legislation. Would re-criminalizing abortion mean less loss of fetal "life" or more loss of female life?

Furthermore, the Church has an internal quandary about its own responsibility for unwanted pregnancies. On the very day that Bishop Law was taking a political stand against abortion, the pope proclaimed that even "natural family planning," the rhythm method, the one form of Church-approved birth control, was also questionable.

In any great civilian war, politicians like to claim that God is on their side. If God is unavailable, a volunteer clergyman makes a formidable recruiter for the party. Archbishop Law protests, "I don't want to be a political boss." But if a clergyman talks like a political boss and walks like a political boss, he must be judged like a political boss.

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Time is ripe for 'new' Indian era

Fourteen years ago, then President Nixon, in a message to congress, set forth a truly remarkable call for a new relationship between the U.S. government and Native American tribes. He asserted that "the time has come to break



Jim Rogers

decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions."

Sadly, however, Nixon's remarkable proposition went unheralded in the ensuing years and similarly remarkable legislation implementing the called for "decisive break" with the past was never passed. Since that time, with few exceptions, U.S. policy toward American Indians has borne sorrowful witness to the old adage "out of sight, out of mind."

The time is overly ripe to rectify the problems that have plagued Native Americans because of federal mismanagement and oppression. The obvious next question is that of what steps ought to be taken in the search to rectify the situation as best as possible. Three fundamental steps ought to be taken by the U.S. government to ameliorate the problems that have been created for American Indians.

First, a fundamental shift as to the end goal of U.S. Indian policy must occur. To date, according to a U.S. Senate Report, "the dominant policy of the Federal government towards the American Indian has been one of coercive assimilation." Renouncing the goal of Indian assimilation requires a rethinking on the part of policy-makers of well intentioned, but misguided, legislation.

Apparently benign policies such as the "Indian Civil Rights" act and massive infusions of social program funds are viewed by many with suspicion. Professor Lawrence Barsh, Foreign Affairs Counsel

to the Mikmaq 'Grand Council, asserts that although these policies are in some ways helpful to Native Americans, "from a political perspective," they are viewed as signs of "increasing administrative incorporation rather than emancipation." In order to avoid making an already bad problem worse, U.S. policy-makers simply must insure that any program intended to aid American Indians is consonant with notions of tribal sovereignty.

The second step in our program to "break decisively with the past" is to set up a full scale Rectification Board to deal exhaustively with tribal land and monetary claims. Similar cases already are pending in courts where Indian tribes are making land and compensatory claims. The creation of a separate Rectification Board would hopefully encourage the development of expertise amongst the adjudicators in sorting through the enormous legal complications that these types of cases attract.

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