

Producer called for funeral hearings

United Press International
WASHINGTON — A House subcommittee voted Tuesday to subpoena a Chicago television station producer who did an undercover expose of the city's funeral home industry.

The House Commerce oversight and investigations subcommittee said Larry Pont of WLS-TV had agreed to be served with the subpoena at the start of hearings today into alleged nationwide consumer abuses by undertakers.

The panel, chaired by Rep. Bob Eckhardt, D-Texas, called the hearing to direct attention on the funeral industry as Congress nears a decision on whether the Federal Trade Commission should be allowed to follow through with a proposed crackdown on undertakers.

The House has voted to scrap the FTC project but the Senate has not. The final decision will be made next week when a conference committee meets to work out differences between House and Senate FTC legislation.

Eckhardt said the House voted "without the benefit of any hearings into the problems of the consumer, the states or the FTC." He said the hearing would examine both the merits of the FTC proposal and the extent of funeral industry lobbying on the matter.

The subcommittee said it subpoenaed Pont "because his station had refused to let him testify voluntarily." The program involved was called "The Last Hurrah: Chicago Style."

The subcommittee also scheduled as witnesses a Catholic priest who alleges he has gotten death threats from funeral directors for supporting state regulation of the industry; a reporter for WHAS-TV in Louisville, Ky., who did an investigation of funeral practices in that city; and a funeral director from San Antonio, who says he can offer a funeral for \$365 compared to the going rate of \$1,400.

Rules tightened on farmers' loans

United Press International
WASHINGTON — A House Agriculture subcommittee has approved an amendment to tighten the rules on farmers who borrow under the Farmers Home Administration's economic emergency loan program.

The amendment, sponsored by Rep. Edward Madigan, R-Ill., would prohibit use of borrowed funds to refinance land or homes unless the real estate were purchased at least one year before a farmer applied for an economic emergency loan.

The amendment addressed an issue raised by congressional investigators who found that economic emergency loans have been used indirectly for farmland purchases, even though the law specifies the money cannot be used to buy or lease land.

Investigators found cases in which farmers bought land with short-term notes and then immediately received economic emergency loans to cover their mortgages.

Madigan's amendment also tightened a credit-elsewhere test. Under the amendment, a farmer could not get an economic emergency loan unless he had a written rejection with an explanation from a credit institution.

Congress is also tightening credit-elsewhere tests for other Farmers Home programs because of abuses.

Farmers can get economic emergency loans under current law if they are "unable at the time the loan application is filed to obtain sufficient credit from normal credit sources to finance actual needs at reasonable rates and terms."

Madigan's amendment would also bar a farmer from getting direct loans under the program unless the Agriculture Department determined that the farmer could not obtain a similar loan backed with a federal guarantee.

Initially, the program was expected to include half direct and half guaranteed loans. But as of last fall, only 4 percent of loans were guaranteed and 96 percent were direct.

On Thursday, the subcommittee approved, by a 15-0 vote, an extension of the economic emergency loan program with several amendments.

The \$4 billion program, started in August 1978 to supplement existing Farmers Home programs and to help farmers recover from low prices, is due to expire May 15. Its main purpose was for refinancing.

Members of the House subcommittee said they did not want several amendments that change the picture of the economic emergency loan program to impede actual lending of money after May 15.

They agreed the program should continue under current rules but that the changes must be made by Oct. 1.

Rep. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said, "Let's face it, the real need is for the money."

In another amendment, the subcommittee approved a subsidy so that the interest rates for guaranteed loans would be as low as rates for direct loans. The difference would be paid by the taxpayers.

Under the current program, interest on direct economic emergency loans is based on cost of money to the government. Higher interest on guaranteed loans is agreed to by a farmer and his banker.

Farmers can borrow no more than \$400,000 under the program. By a 6-5 vote, the subcommittee added another limitation — farmers can use no more than \$50,000 out of \$400,000 for current farm operating expenses. The rest would have to go for refinancing of debts or major purchases like machinery.

Nation's citrus crop booming; more oranges

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Americans have an abundance of citrus to eat this season.

The Agriculture Department Monday estimated this season's orange crop at a record 261 million boxes, 24 percent greater than last season.

The latest estimate was up 1 percent from January.

The Florida orange crop is expected to be 200 million boxes, up 22 percent from last season, and the California crop, 54 million boxes, up 45 percent.

The estimate of the Florida crop was unchanged from last month and the estimate of the California crop was up 6 percent.

Based on Feb. 1 conditions, the department's Crop Reporting Board said January harvest in Florida was "generally heavy" and groves were in "excellent condition."

The frozen concentrated orange juice yield for Florida oranges was up to 1.33 gallons per box.

The board said eating quality of this season's California Navel oranges is excellent.

The estimate of the nation's grapefruit crop, at 67.6 million boxes, was unchanged from last month but 1 percent above last year.

The lemon crop was estimated at 19.6 million boxes, the same as last month and 1 percent above last season.

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