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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

USAB 116

December 24, 1980

JOHN R. BLOCK : AGRICULTURE NOMINEE (PROFILE)

ILLINOIS FARMER TO EMPHASIZE EXPORTS

GREATER EMPHASIS ON AGRICULTURAL TRADE AND EXPORTS IS LIKELY TO BE A PRIMARY INTEREST OF PRESIDENT-ELECT RONALD REAGAN'S CHOICE FOR SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE.

JOHN R. BLOCK, AN ACTIVE FARMER AND DIRECTOR OF THE ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, HAS BEEN A LEADER IN PROMOTING FOOD EXPORTS AND READILY POINTS OUT THAT HIS STATE IS AMERICA'S LARGEST EXPORTER OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.

AS DIRECTOR, BLOCK TRAVELED WIDELY ON FACT-FINDING TOURS AND TO PROMOTE ILLINOIS AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS. AMONG THE COUNTRIES HE HAS VISITED ARE THE SOVIET UNION, HUNGARY, POLAND AND CHINA.

HE TOLD REPORTERS DECEMBER 23 THAT ONE OF HIS FIRST PRIORITIES AS AGRICULTURAL SECRETARY WOULD BE TO WORK ON LIFTING THE SOVIET GRAIN EMBARGO "UNDER THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES AND AT THE RIGHT TIME."

BLOCK POINTED OUT THAT EVEN IF THE EMBARGO WERE LIFTED, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO BUY ADDITIONAL AMERICAN GRAIN, SINCE IT HAS ALREADY PURCHASED THE MAXIMUM ALLOWED UNDER A FIVE-YEAR U. S. -SOVIET BILATERAL AGREEMENT. FURTHER PURCHASES ARE SUBJECT TO CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS.

HE SAID HE IS GENERALLY OPPOSED TO BILATERAL GRAIN AGREEMENTS -- THAT THE FREE MARKET SYSTEM IS THE BEST WAY TO ALLOCATE FOOD SUPPLIES WORLDWIDE. THE ILLINOIS FARMER TOLD REPORTERS THAT FOOD "IS ONE OF THE MOST TREMENDOUS WEAPONS WE HAVE."

BLOCK'S NOMINATION HAS BEEN STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY SENATOR ROBERT DOLE (R-KAN.), CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, WHO CONTENDS THAT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION NEEDS AN ACTIVE FARMER AS AGRICULTURE SECRETARY AND A MIDWESTERNER IN THE CABINET.

BLOCK, 45, A WEST POINT GRADUATE, IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FARMERS IN ILLINOIS. HIS 3,000-ACRE (1,200-HECTARE) CORN, SOYBEAN AND HOG FARM HAS EXPANDED FROM ITS ORIGINAL 700 ACRES (280 HECTARES) SINCE THE EARLY 1960'S.

ACCORDING TO ILLINOIS FARM GROUPS, BLOCK HAS ESTABLISHED A GOOD RECORD ON SOIL CONSERVATION, PRESERVATION OF FARMLANDS AND OTHER PERTINENT AGRICULTURAL ISSUES. HE FAVORS HIGHER PRICE SUPPORTS FOR FARM PRODUCTS BUT IS AGAINST MOST OTHER GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

ON THE SUBJECT OF FOOD STAMPS -- A PROGRAM OF FOOD AID TO THE POOR IN THE UNITED STATES -- BLOCK SAID HE IS "NOT OPPOSED IN PRINCIPLE BUT...IT'S REALLY GETTING OUT OF HAND." THE PROGRAM'S RATE OF GROWTH, HE SAID, MUST BE HALTED.

BLOCK FEELS HE COULD DO A GOOD JOB AS SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, EVEN THOUGH HE HAS NO SIGNIFICANT WASHINGTON EXPERIENCE.

"I THINK I COULD BRING SOMETHING TO WASHINGTON THAT WOULD BE VERY VITAL AND USEFUL, AND THAT'S AN AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUND...A BACKGROUND IN FARMING EXPERIENCE AND VERY RECENT FARMING EXPERIENCE," BLOCK SAID. "I WOULD SAY THAT SERVING AS DIRECTOR OF ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL STATES IN THIS LAND IS NOT TOO BAD A BACKGROUND ALSO," HE ADDED.

BLOCK SAID HE IS BOTH HOPEFUL AND CONFIDENT THAT THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE WILL HAVE A STRONG VOICE IN THE REAGAN CABINET.

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