

# Village of Byesville, Ohio

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D O N A L D J . G A D D , M A Y O R

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006

RE: Field Hearing on Rural Ohio  
A review of the Community Development Block Grant

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Financial Services  
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

Honorable Robert W. Ney, Chairman  
Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing today. As I know your schedule is busy and we all have pressing issues, I will keep my comments as succinct as possible.

As with the proposed cuts in the Local Government Fund by the State a couple of years ago, no issue will probably impact local governments more than the CDBG cuts in the administration's current budget proposal.

At that time, local officials from all over Ohio convened at the Statehouse to impress upon our legislators the absolute importance of Local Government Funds and inform them that the lack of same would have a significant impact on our 'grassroots' government here in Ohio. Because, here in the heartland, at the local level, we work hard to get a dollar's worth of progress for a dollar's worth of grant money, and in many cases, with community support, we get much more than that dollar.

Additionally, I lobbied hard for the passage and approval by the Voters of this State of Issue I (formerly called Issue II) as it is at the core of Ohio's ability to rebuild the roads and bridges needed to compete with today's modal industry. Ohioans recognized its importance and passed this issue overwhelmingly.

As you know, I have been mayor of a small Village here in southeast Ohio for several years. During those years we have seen a significant renewal of jobs, opportunity and replacement of a blighted downtown due in part by the securing of CDBG grants.

Currently, we are working on tier grants for an additional \$400,000, that, along with engineering and architectural design, will redevelop our downtown into a stop along the nation's tourism highway. A local initiative creating a 501C3 corp will provide a tourist train with historic renditions of our coal mining heritage and eventually end up at the Wilds (the largest game preserve of its type in North America). These grant moneys will be the catalyst to get the owner operators to 'buy-in' to our economic future. Job creation at the local level is *grassroots America* and this buy in is not possible in most cases without a grant incentive.

Over the next eighteen months , the Village will involved in securing grants for a new wastewater treatment plant, working with the Ohio Department of Development and others to secure grants, including CDBG, for approximately twenty seven to thirty million dollars worth of industrial and commercial expansion in this town of three thousand. The job opportunities and expanded local economy alone will more than pay for the initial monies put forward for these projects.

As I have traveled much of rural Ohio, being in the energy business, let me assure that each and every small town, township, and county has something to point to that was initiated, supplemented, or completed because of Community Development Block Grants. From fire trucks, to infrastructure, to enhancement projects these competitive funds have been a source of creating a better America that would not have otherwise been possible. To take this away would end many of rural Ohioans dreams of making a better place to live and work.

On another note, being one, much like yourself, with deep roots in this area, I am involved in other activities that are sometimes outside scope of my being mayor, and sometimes within my jurisdiction so I can assist or help. I am speaking of the local Habitat for Humanity, of which I have been the president of these last three years, and the Community Housing Improvement Program. Both of which have created dramatic improvements in the community and for the individuals benefiting there from.

I am well aware of the chairman's help in securing funding from the House for one of the new habitat homes in Byesville, as I was the one who got the land donated for it. The recipient of that home now sets on our local habitat board and is involved in getting others the home they could only dream about a few short years ago.

Since the house that the House built, the local chapter has solved most of its funding issues, as over the last several years we have received CDBG grants for fifty thousand dollars each year that goes to build not one, but two new homes each year. Each home bringing pride in ownership and the American dream to those that didn't even envision it for themselves or their families. One such case is a local man who I have asked to share his story.

This man *is* the American Dream and his story is the essence of all of what we do and what we believe as public servants and people responsible and caring about those around us. For you see, when he first applied to habitat, he lived in a very small, and old, two bedroom trailer home on relative's acreage. He was a divorced father of five, included one with physical handicaps, with some learning disabilities of his own. He had held down the same job for twenty plus years, but couldn't afford or believe his life would change.

On the initial visit to his home, we found the ringer washer on the back porch, the windows all caulked shut as best as possible, the vents missing in the floor because the trailer was too old to find replacements and the floor moved up and down as we walked through it.

However, on that initial visit, and subsequent visits, the home was always neat and clean down to the kid's mementos and play things pinned or shelved on the walls. As the place was too small to store their individual things, each child had space on the wall for his or her things.

Today, that man and his children live in a split level, six bedroom home that they put more than their required 'sweat equity' into. Their home cost was thirty nine thousand dollars. Twenty five thousand by CDBG grant, and the rest through local contributions and help.

They participate in our other projects, and he was extremely proud to tell me that he has found a new job that pays more and provides better for his family. His outlook on life is much brighter now, and he, like the others have hope for himself and his children's future.

Mr. Chairman, this would not have happened without CDBG grants. Nor would have homeownership happened for others without the CHIP program, nor would have local enhancement projects solely or partially funded by CDBG. As with the Local Government Funds, grassroots local government gets much more done with a buck than just spending it. We create jobs, households, social wellbeing, and improvements in the communities in which we live and take care of. I urge you and your fellow congressman to keep the CDBG intact, as it adds to our great country at its very roots and simply put from a small town mayor, "that's where America starts and that's what government is all about."

Thank you again for the pleasure of addressing this hearing.

Regards,  
The Village of Byesville

Donald J. Gadd, Mayor

Attending with Mayor Gadd

Evelyn King, Coordinator  
Community Housing Improvement Program

Kathy Werner, Secretary Treasurer  
Guernsey County Habitat for Humanity