One in Five Americans Cannot Afford To Buy Enough Food - S H A M E F U L -

New food hardship data from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) show continuing struggles with hunger for millions of Americans throughout 2011. Nearly one in five Americans said there were times they didn’t have enough money to buy food that they or their families needed. Mississippi has the worst rate among states with 24.5% reporting food hardship. Regionally, the hardest hit were the Southeast and Southwest regions.

“Rising food prices, continuing high unemployment and underemployment, and flat food stamp benefit allotments all contributed to the high food hardship rate in 2011,” said FRAC President Jim Weill. “Particularly challenging was the increase in food inflation, especially for the foods the government uses to construct the Thrifty Food Plan, its cheapest diet. Food stamp beneficiaries lost more then 6% of their food purchasing power because of this increase.”

Food hardship rates are too high in every corner of the nation, and the national 2011 rate was higher than the 2010 rate, even though economic growth was picking up. It is crucial that the nation rebuild its economy, strengthen employment and wages, and develop public supports that will dramatically decrease these food hardship numbers and do so quickly. Essential steps include: a growing economy that provides full-time jobs at decent wages, shares prosperity and pulls households out of hunger and poverty; strengthened income supports (e.g., unemployment insurance, TANF, refundable tax credits) that help struggling workers and families; and strengthened – not reduced, as some in Congress are proposing – federal nutrition programs (SNAP/Food Stamps, school meals, WIC, summer, after-school and child care food) that reach more households – senior, children and working-age adults alike – in need.

The number of people at risk of hunger in the U.S. increased from 36.2 million in 2007 to 48.8 million in 2010.

The New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Areas rank #11 in the top 25 food hardship metropolitan areas in 2010-2011.
Mississippi followed by Alabama lead the top 20 States for food hardship in 2011. Louisiana is listed as #10 with an overall food hardship rate of 21.3%.

Of the 436 congressional districts in the United States, Louisiana’s congressional districts rank as follows for food hardship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scalise</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Landry</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fleming</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Boustany, Jr.</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>106</td>
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Fortunately, polls demonstrate that Americans in every community want the federal government to attack hunger aggressively, not slash anti-hunger efforts. In a poll conducted by FRAC in January 2012, 69% (7 in 10) of voters said the federal government should have a major role to ensure that low-income families and children have the food and nutrition they need. Only 12% of voters, roughly 1 in 8, thought the federal government is spending too much money on hunger, while 78% of voters say the federal government should be spending more money on solving hunger or should continue to spend the same amount. When voters are told that Congress is considering cutting billions of dollars to reduce government spending, by 77% to 15% they say cutting food assistance programs like the food stamp program is the wrong way to reduce government spending. And these attitudes cross party lines.

As a nation, even in difficult times, we have the resources to eliminate hunger for our citizens, regardless of age or family configuration. The cost of not doing so – in terms of damage to health, education, early childhood development and productivity – is too high. The moral cost of not doing so is even higher.

We live in challenging times. The budget debate in Congress could result in the most severe cuts to programs for hungry and poor people in over 30 years. Over the next decade, Congress will be implementing its plan to cut more than $2 trillion, which is much larger than any previous deficit-reduction measures.

“**The biblical vision of salvation is not that of isolated individuals enjoying a personal relationship with God, but rather of communities of persons worshipping God and embracing God’s design for their common life.**”

Dr. Ron Sider
President, Evangelicals for Social Action.
Congress must protect programs for hungry and poor people from cuts. In fact, all major deficit-reduction efforts in the past 30 years have exempted key domestic programs that affect hungry and poor people.

Reducing our nation’s long-term deficits is critical, but hungry and poor people didn’t cause the problem, and cutting them won’t make a dent in our deficits.

These programs amount to 15% of the federal budget. For every dollar in the federal budget, only 14 cents goes to domestic social safety net programs (excluding Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program). Less than 1 cent per dollar goes to foreign assistance programs focused on reducing hunger and poverty.

During the current recession, programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) are working to mitigate hunger and poverty. Without them, hunger and poverty rates would have been higher during this recession.

Domestic and international anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs help build a more productive economy, develop a more educated work force, raise healthier children and save lives.

In 2011, the House approved budget and spending bills that cut deeply into national nutrition programs for women, infants, and children as well as U.S. investments in global agricultural development, microfinance, education, and safe water in developing countries. They proposed turning mandatory programs such as SNAP into block grants, which would prevent the program from responding to increased need during economic downturns.

Reducing our nation’s long-term deficits is critical, but hungry and poor people didn’t cause the problem, and cutting programs that help them won’t make a dent in our deficits. Cutting these programs will have a devastating impact on the most vulnerable members of our society and add to global instability.

Hunger is a serious problem in America. More than 1 in 7 Americans live below the poverty line of $22,113 for a family of four. Nearly 49 million Americans – including 1 in 5 children – live in households that struggle to put food on
the table. Food Banks in the U.S. saw a 46% increase from 36.2 million in 2007 to 48.8 million in 2010. The fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger is through our nation’s nutrition programs, which meet the needs of millions of children and other vulnerable people. These programs serve 1 in 4 Americans annually.

We live in a country where citizens have an important role in influencing government. When public resources seem scarce, we can fall into a “save yourself” mentality. Mistrust toward government grows during weak economic times, as does a “less-government-is-better” approach to social policy. Whether we live with material abundance or struggle to make ends meet, we may feel frustrated by government or see efforts to engage government as futile. We forget that as Christian citizens, we have a moral duty to influence government to be a force for good in our world.

God has indeed ordained government for a special role in the protection and development of our neighbors. In Psalm 72: 12-14 the psalmist describes the just and righteous king: “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.” A key characteristic of a ruler described in the Hebrew Scriptures is to be a protector of the most vulnerable people.

Loving our neighbor and seeking opportunities to be forgivers, restorers, and reconcilers in the social structures of our day is doing God’s work in our time.

Urge your member of Congress to form a circle of protection around programs vital to poor and hungry people.

1. Protecting poor and hungry people is a fundamental value of our country.
2. Congress must take a holistic approach to cutting the deficit.
3. Anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs keep millions of Americans from going hungry and falling into poverty.

Call the Capitol switchboard to be connected to your member of Congress: 202-224-3121.