



Bread for the World Louisiana

**The Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice
Loyola University New Orleans**

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Turn Swords into Ploughshares

National priorities are determined by the manner in which a nation allocates its limited resources; how and where it spends its money. At the end of July Congress passed a \$33 billion supplemental war bill for President Obama's troop surge in Afghanistan. Recently the president signed a multibillion-dollar bailout bill for cash-strapped states but cut \$12 billion from future food stamp funding to help pay for it. Proponents of this measure argue that using food stamp funding in order to save public sector jobs such as teachers, police officers, and firefighters at the state level is a valid trade-off.

Now the Senate is at it again. To pay for the \$8 billion Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act, the Senate has agreed to trim the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps. According to the Huffington Post, "In April 2009 the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act boosted monthly benefits under SNAP by 13.6%. As economic misery has worsened, participation in SNAP has risen since then from 34.4 million to 40.8 million as of May

2010. That's one of every seven Americans" or approximately 41 million people.

As the economy has worsened the need for these benefits has increased dramatically. Currently, the average benefit is \$133.77 per month. If the Senate has its way, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) estimates that a family of four will receive \$59 less per month starting in November 2013.

In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson declared The War on Poverty. This was in response to a national poverty rate of around nineteen percent. By placing poverty at the forefront of the American psyche Johnson was able to champion historic legislation that reallocated national resources in order to address poverty at its core. Programs such as Head Start, food stamps, work-study, Medicare and Medicaid, were implemented and many still exist today.

In spite of President Johnson's Herculean efforts, according to Reuters the U.S. poverty rate hit its highest level in 11 years in 2008 as the worst recession since the Great Depression threw millions of Americans out of work. The government defines poverty as an annual income of \$22,025 for a family of four, \$17,163 for a family of three and \$14,051 for a family of two. The Census Bureau said the poverty rate -- the percentage of people living in poverty -- jumped to 13.2%, the highest level since 1997, from 12.5% in 2007. In spite of these realities, Congress is passing and the president is signing into law legislation that is taking resources away from those who need it most at the time they are most in need.

According to the US Census Bureau, 36 million people live below the poverty line in America,

including 13 million children. According to the Bread for the World Institute, 14.6% of U.S. households struggle to put enough food on the table. More than 49 million Americans—including 16.7 million children—live in these households.

In March 2010 the Obama administration announced the implementation of the Supplemental Poverty Measure, a new and more accurate portrayal of America's poor. The poverty formula from Johnson's War on Poverty failed to account for the increase of modern day expenses such as childcare, health care, commuting, housing, and other expenses. As these standards are put in place, the numbers should only get worse. According to the Christian Science Monitor, "experts expect the new poverty measure will increase the percentage of people classified as poor, especially among elderly Americans. Poverty rates will probably increase from 13.2%, or 39.8 million people, to 15.8%, or 47.4 million, reports the Associated Press." In spite of these realities, Congress is passing and the president is signing into law legislation that is taking resources away from those who need it most at the time they are most in need.

At a time when actual unemployment rates in America are in the double digits and the American economy is in its deepest recession in almost 70 years, Democratic leaders in the Senate have agreed to cut funding to pay for food assistance for working families, especially children. They can agree to increase funding for war in Afghanistan but vote to cut funding for a winnable war against poverty and hunger at home. As Dr. King stated, we are, "compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor..." and we should attack it as such. Instead of turning swords into ploughshares; instead of ceasing

to perpetuate war and start using money to improve the lives of American citizens, the Senate decides to continue making swords.

By Wilmerleon, Politics in Color

Nearly one in four kids - 17 million children, - struggle against hunger in the United States. While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly devastating for children. Even short-term episodes of hunger can cause lasting damage to child development, putting children at risk for a range of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical problems.

Children who are hungry can:

- Exhibit decreased attention and lower test scores;
- Display aggression, tardiness, and absenteeism;
- Become sick or hospitalized.

We have the tools to end child hunger in our country.

Strengthening child nutrition programs provides an immediate and direct way to reduce child hunger and improve health and educational outcomes. Programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), school breakfast and lunch programs, and preschool, summer, and after-school meal programs are vital in providing children the food they need for healthy development.

Unfortunately, child nutrition programs do not reach every child who needs food.

Of the 19.5 million schoolchildren receiving food assistance at lunch, 10 million do not receive breakfast assistance and 17 million do not receive

summer meals. Many eligible children lack access to programs or face other barriers to participation, whether it is because a program is not offered in their community, transportation is limited, or eligibility provisions lack coordination with other agencies. Child nutrition programs could do far more to reduce hunger simply by reaching more kids.

- ☛ There are 101,000 schools operating the National School Lunch Program, but only 87,000 operating the School Breakfast Program.
- ☛ Only 34,700 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites operate nationwide.
- ☛ Of the 19.5 million children receiving free or reduced-price lunches each school day, 46% receive breakfast and just 115 receive summer food.

Child nutrition programs are only effective when they reach the children who need food. The top priority for Child Nutrition Reauthorization must be to increase program access and participation among eligible low-income children.

Congress is scheduled to reauthorize child nutrition programs in 2010. The first step in the process is to secure significant new investments in the programs. Congress should build on the president's request for \$1 billion per year in new resources. Without adequate funding, authorizing committees will be unable to make necessary improvements to these programs, leaving millions of children without access to needed food.

Act Now: Child nutrition programs could do much more to reduce child hunger simply by reaching more hungry kids. Tell Congress to provide

\$1 billion per year in new investments to increase program access and participation for hungry kids.

Urge our nation's leaders to end hunger



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