



Congresswoman
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Press Release

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DELAURO ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD, NUTRITION AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The hearing is called to order.

I want to once again welcome Ranking Member Kingston, our fellow Members of the Committee, and our distinguished guests today, as we take a look at the President's budget requests for our vital nutrition assistance programs under the subcommittee's purview, including the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP).

Our distinguished panelists today include Kevin Concannon, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, who spoke with us two weeks ago on child nutrition issues. Thank you, Under Secretary Concannon, for returning today. In addition, we will be hearing from Julie Paradis, the administrator of FNS, and Robert Post, Deputy Director of CNPP. We understand that you are filling in for your boss, Rajen Anand, who is ill. We thank you for that and wish him the very best. I look forward to your testimony.

Dr. Concannon, a quote from your testimony of a fortnight ago has stuck with me ever since. That would be President Harry Truman's admonition that "Nothing is more important in our national life than the welfare of our children, and proper nourishment comes first in attaining this welfare."

As you explained, the president came to this conclusion after discovering how often soldiers engaged in the WWII war effort came to the army undernourished and malnourished. What is true then is even more true today. As Secretary Vilsack noted in our opening hearings last month, one report recently found that as many as 75% of Americans age 17-24 are currently unfit for the armed services, due mainly to malnutrition and obesity.

As I said to you two weeks ago and as the First Lady has also been making clear with her Let's Move! campaign, the co-existence of obesity and hunger seems paradoxical at first, until you come to realize that they are in fact a double-edged sword, aimed right at our children. With one in five kids living below the poverty line and on food stamps, not to mention a staggering 69% of school lunch program participants received free and reduced price lunches, it becomes that much harder for struggling families to afford the healthy, nutritious foods that would improve children's health.

That is why I am concerned about reports that the Senate might move forward with a child nutrition reauthorization bill that cuts the Administration's request by more than half. It is vitally important that we fund nutrition assistance to the fullest of our ability. We must do what we can to give this generation of American children the access to healthy, nutritious foods that will allow them to thrive.

Indeed, our funding of these programs becomes even more crucial when you consider the woeful budget situation at the state level right now. This recession has driven state budgets all across the country to the brink, and right now local and state governments are slashing the social safety net that families depend on to survive in order to compensate.

In New Jersey and Virginia, to take just two examples, child meal programs have been drastically cut, with millions in proposed cuts to their respective school breakfast programs. This despite the fact that research has shown time and time again that kids who eat breakfast before school learn more, behave better, and are healthier than those who do not.

I have been focusing a lot on children, but – particularly in the midst of this virulent recession – hunger knows no age, sex, or region of the country. With one in eight Americans relying on Food Stamps right now, we must continue to give crucial nutrition assistance programs like SNAP and WIC our strongest federal support.

Of course, given the finite resources at our disposal, we need to ensure that money put toward these nutrition programs are being well spent. As I said two weeks ago, if we increase reimbursement rates for school food programs, we should also work to reduce waste and overhead in these programs, and maximize the amount of money being used to help kids. But let us remember, SNAP and WIC have extraordinarily high accuracy rates for government programs – 95 percent and over 95 percent respectively – so this is an arena where the people's resources seems to be very well spent.

In addition to maximizing our “bang-for-the-buck”, we should also make sure that we are making it as quick and easy as possible for American families to access the best and most up-to-date science-based health and nutrition information available. So with that in mind, I am pleased to hear about the revamping going on at the popular MyPyramid.Gov website, which I believe Mr. Post will be telling us more about.

At the same time, I am looking forward to hearing more about the revised dietary guidelines coming out this fall. And I hope we can find ways to put an end to industry-generated nutrition charades like the one we saw last year with the Smart Choices program. To qualify for the 'Smart Choices' label, the product had to meet a set of criteria based on the dietary guidelines.

However, because the dietary guidelines do not set a standard for sugar, we saw extraordinarily sugary cereal, such as Froot Loops and Cookie Crisp, being promoted as an FDA-approved healthy option. As Mr. Kingston suggested at our last nutrition hearing, just because you eat one doughnut instead of two, that does not make it a smart choice.

In any case, those are the broad parameters of what I hope to hear today. I look forward to hearing today's testimony on how best to help fulfill our nutrition responsibilities from the panel.

Thank you. Mr. Kingston, would you like to say a few words?

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