

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION AND HUMAN NEEDS

June 22, 1977

In our previous hearings, the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs received convincing evidence of the correlation between diet and physical health. Medical experts are aware now of the relationship between an individual's dietary habits and the risk of obesity, heart disease, and cancer. Eating less sugar and fats, and more fiber, can reduce our vulnerability to these killer diseases. Because of this preponderance of medical information, I am convinced that a valuable public service was performed by the publication of the Nutrition Committee Staff Report, "Dietary Goals for the U.S."

Some of the recommendations aroused controversy. Various food industries, including beef producers in Kansas, challenged certain of the interpretations. It may be that revisions are required in some of the conclusions. Basically, however, I continue to support the purpose behind the report. It was never intended that the government would be dictating the foods that Americans should and should not eat. Not even Congress is likely to stretch its regulatory power that far. But the weight of the scientific evidence is sufficiently strong that this nutritional information should be put immediately before the American people. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. The public is then in a position to make informed individual judgments.

We are learning now that nutrition plays an important role in the mental as well as the physical health of a human being. We know that what a pregnant woman eats and drinks will affect the pre-natal mental development of her baby. Today, however, we hear further testimony that some mental and emotional irregularities, such as schizophrenia, hyper-activity, and some types of juvenile delinquency can be successfully treated by modifying dietary patterns. The possibility that mental illness can be brought under control by correcting nutritional deficiencies is a significant discovery.

This opens up an entire new avenue of psychiatric treatment through sensible nutritional practices. If the costly toll of mental illness can be relieved, almost effortlessly, by changing the eating habits of disturbed individuals, healthful nutrition could have the impact of a wonder drug.

Additional study should be devoted to this. Our responsibility is to shed light on the findings.