

STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE
PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON FOOD ASSISTANCE HEARING
IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, NOVEMBER 14, 1983

MR. DOLE. I REGRET NOT BEING ABLE TO BE PRESENT HERE AT THE KANSAS CITY HEARING OF THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON FOOD ASSISTANCE, BUT THE SENATE IS IN SESSION TODAY. ^{AS CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION} I WISH YOU WELL IN YOUR ATTEMPTS TO EVALUATE THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF REPORTED "HUNGER" PROBLEMS AROUND THE COUNTRY. WE IN THE CONGRESS LOOK FORWARD ^{WITH INTEREST} TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT YOU WILL MAKE AT THE CONCLUSION OF YOUR GREAT TASK. I CONGRATULATE THE PRESIDENT FOR DEMONSTRATING HIS ACTIVE CONCERN ABOUT FOOD ASSISTANCE PROBLEMS IN THIS COUNTRY BY APPOINTING THIS SPECIAL TASK FORCE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF CLAY LA FORCE.

WITH MEDIA REPORTS OF THE RISE OF HUNGER IN THE U.S., THOSE OF US WHO HAVE JURISDICTION OVER FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS IN THE CONGRESS BECAME VERY CONCERNED AND HAVE SPENT MOST OF THIS YEAR TRYING TO ASSESS WHAT EXACTLY IS HAPPENING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THIS COUNTRY. EXTENSIVE HEARINGS HAVE BEEN HELD BY OUR COMMITTEES. HOWEVER, WE WERE CONSTANTLY FRUSTRATED BY THE LACK OF OBJECTIVE DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THESE REPORTS -- MOST OF WHAT WE FOUND WAS ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE COMPILED BY THE MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL "HUNGER" ADVOCATES OR POLITICAL GROUPS.

DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS PROVIDING BENEFITS TO MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE AND SPENDING MORE FUNDS THAN

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PREVIOUSLY, MANY AMERICANS ARE FACED WITH SERIOUS PROBLEMS AND NEED FOOD ASSISTANCE, AND SOME DESERVING CITIZENS ARE FALLING BETWEEN THE CRACKS OF THE REGULAR NUTRITION PROGRAM STRUCTURE. LAST APRIL, MY NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE HELD A HEARING ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF LOW-INCOME AMERICANS IN THE 1980'S, IN AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF REPORTED "HUNGER PROBLEMS" AND THE POTENTIAL CAUSES. THIS HEARING, AND OTHER CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, HAVE MERELY UNDERScoreD THE FACT THAT THERE IS A REAL PAUCITY OF COMPREHENSIVE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION. THIS SITUATION ^{MAKES IT} ~~IS~~ EXTREMELY ^{DIFFICULT} ~~FRUSTRATING~~ FOR POLICYMAKERS, WHO HAVE TO TRY TO RESPOND IN A RATIONAL WAY TO SERIOUS PROBLEMS WHEN THEY EXIST.

ABOUT \$12.8 BILLION WAS SPENT ON THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM DURING THE LAST FISCAL YEAR, AS OPPOSED TO \$9.1 BILLION DURING 1980. TOTAL FUNDING FOR FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS DURING THE LAST FISCAL YEAR WAS SOMEWHERE AROUND \$17.8. DURING FISCAL YEAR 1983, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPENT CLOSE TO \$17.8 BILLION ON ABOUT 10 SEPARATE NUTRITION PROGRAMS, WHILE COMBINED FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAM EXPENDITURES WERE ABOUT \$14 BILLION THREE YEARS AGO.

IN ADDITION TO THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, WHICH PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE EFFORT, THERE ARE NUMEROUS CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS, INCLUDING SCHOOL LUNCH, SCHOOL BREAKFAST, CHILD CARE FOOD, SUMMER FOOD, COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL, AND ^{THE} SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN, USUALLY REFERRED

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TO AS WIC. NEARLY \$4.8 BILLION ANNUALLY IS BEING SPENT ON THESE PROGRAMS, IN ADDITION TO ELDERLY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. MORE BENEFITS ARE BEING PROVIDED BY A COMPREHENSIVE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAM STRUCTURE THAN EVER BEFORE, DESPITE RECENT AND NECESSARY EFFORTS TO REDUCE ENTITLEMENT SPENDING, WHICH RESULTED IN BETTER TARGETING OF BENEFITS TO THE MOST NEEDY AND IMPROVING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION.

THE PROLONGED RECESSION, AND ~~HIGH~~ SUSTAINED HIGH RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT, HAVE ACCENTUATED PROBLEMS IN THE FOOD ASSISTANCE AREA, BUT COMMUNITY EFFORTS HAVE EXPANDED IN AN ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS THE ADDITIONAL NEED. THIS YEAR, THE CONGRESS RESPONDED TO THIS NEED BY PASSING A TWO YEAR EXTENSION OF THE TEMPORARY EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE ACT, WHICH I WAS PLEASED TO INTRODUCE IN THE SENATE AS PART OF AN UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION PACKAGE. THIS ACT REQUIRES THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TO DISTRIBUTE SURPLUS AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES LIKE CHEESE, BUTTER, WHEAT, RICE, CORN, SOYBEANS, AND HONEY, TO ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE FOOD ASSISTANCE TO LOW-INCOME AND UNEMPLOYED PERSONS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. IN ADDITION THE LEGISLATION INCLUDED \$50 MILLION TO HELP PAY FOR INTRASTATE DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE.

THERE IS ALREADY A COMPREHENSIVE FOOD ASSISTANCE NETWORK IN PLACE, CONSISTING OF DIVERSE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS, SOME STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS, AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER EFFORTS. IN

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THEORY, MOST OF THE FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED FOOD ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND HELP SOMEHOW, PROVIDED THEY KNOW WHERE TO GO. SOME "HUNGER" ACTIVISTS WOULD ADVOCATE THAT THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE SHOULD REST WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, IT IS MY VIEW THAT FEDERAL EFFORTS SHOULD BE GENEROUSLY SUPPLEMENTED BY STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS--ALL WORKING TOGETHER WITH NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS.

SOME WOULD SAY THAT VARIOUS POLICY CHANGES IN THE FEDERAL ^{NUTRITION} PROGRAMS SHOULD BE MADE, BUT NOBODY IS IN AGREEMENT AS TO THE CHANGES THAT WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING THE KINDS OF PROBLEMS THAT EXIST IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. THE TRUTH IS THAT NO ONE SET OF POLICY CHANGES FROM THE FEDERAL LEVEL WILL EVER BE ABLE TO GUARANTEE AN ERADICATION OF ALL THE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROBLEMS THAT EXIST IN OUR COUNTRY. THERE ^{SIMPLY} ARE ~~SIMPLY~~ NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS.

WHILE NUTRITION PROGRAMS HAVE HAD A DRAMATIC, POSITIVE IMPACT ON HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN THIS COUNTRY, THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY -- NO MATTER HOW SENSITIVE -- IS ILL-EQUIPPED TO RESPOND TO ALL THE PROBLEMS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED FOOD ASSISTANCE. THIS ~~IS THE~~ KIND OF RESPONSIBILITY THAT MUST BE SPREAD AND SHARED.

AS A MEMBER OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION BACK IN THE '60'S, AND, AS THE CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE NUTRITION SUBCOMMITTEE, OF WHICH, FOR MANY YEARS, I WAS RANKING MINORITY MEMBER, I HAVE ACTIVELY

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PARTICIPATED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS SINCE THE LATE '60'S. FOR THE MOST PART, IT IS MY VIEW THAT FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE IN ALLEVIATING DOMESTIC NUTRITION PROBLEMS. NO ONE WHO OBJECTIVELY REVIEWS THE ISSUE CAN BELIEVE THAT WE ARE WITNESSING A RETURN TO THE HUNGER CONDITIONS EXISTING IN THIS COUNTRY TWO DECADES AGO. STILL, WE MUST MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO EVALUATE THE KIND OF PROBLEMS THAT CONTINUE TO EXIST DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS AND RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF OUR LESS FORTUNATE CITIZENS WITH THE TRADITIONAL GENEROSITY OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT.