

Dick Lugar

U.S. Senator for Indiana

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Lugar wants expansion of summer meal programs for kids

U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar introduced legislation today to encourage states to feed more children during the summer.

Lugar made the announcement during a press conference for the release of a new Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) study showing only one-in-five of the 15.3 million children who receive free or reduced priced school lunches during the school year are served by federal nutrition programs during the summer. Among the conclusions in the report, "Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation," is that the children being served meals in the summer, 3.2 million, could be easily doubled if all states simply performed as well as the leading states. (A full copy of the report can be found at <http://www.frac.org/html/news/sfsp2002.htm>)

The report also says "of special significance is what happened last summer in 13 states that were included in a three-year pilot project sponsored by Sen. Richard Lugar and enacted by Congress for implementation beginning in summer 2001. . . The pilot, which is available to schools, governments agencies, residential camps and National Youth Sports Programs, eases paperwork and provides the maximum reimbursement for all meals."

"We are delighted that the 13-state pilots seem to be working," said FRAC president Jim Weill.

As a whole, the 13 pilot states, Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming, which were the worst performers in 2000, reversed their trend of declining numbers of sponsors, sites and daily participation by children in the Summer Food Service Program. The pilot states increased by almost 9 percent while other states decreased by more than 3 percent. Although Indiana improved by nearly 11 percent in participation, the state ranked 42nd for the ratio of children in summer nutrition programs compared to the school year free or reduced price school lunch participation (one-in-ten school year participants receiving summer meals).

"It is now time for the Congress to step up and take action once again to improve further the capacity of the Summer Food Service Program. I am announcing that today I am introducing a new bill, along with Agriculture Committee Chairman Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), that will apply the simpler and more flexible pilot rules to every state. Such action will eliminate the current waiver requirement and make it more appealing to become a program sponsor. Additional program sponsors mean serving additional needy children," Lugar said.

"The Summer Food Service Program was created to help fill this gap in low-income neighborhoods by providing needy children with the nutrition they need to learn, play and grow throughout the summer

months. Although this Program is the largest federal resource available to feed children during the summer, it is clear that there is substantial unmet need.

“Unfortunately, participation in the Summer Food Service Program has been stagnant or declining for the last several years. A significant number of potential Program sponsors are unaware that federal funding is available to provide free meals and snacks to needy children. In addition, organizations eligible for sponsorship often report that the Program’s administrative requirements are unusually complex and that the reimbursement policy makes it difficult for a sponsor to break even financially,” Lugar said.

“States also have to have a volition to participate. The federal government provides the money but the states take the leadership. For children to get fed, somebody in the states has to do something. This is particularly important to the most fragile children, whose participation in summer recreation or education program may be determined by the fact that a meal is provided.”

Lugar has been a child nutrition advocate in the U.S. Senate for more than 20 years and was also active in child nutrition leadership as a member of the Indianapolis school board and later as mayor of Indianapolis. During the 1995 welfare reform debate, Lugar fought successfully to continue the federal school breakfast and lunch programs, against a strong movement to end the federal program. He has worked to improve the food stamp program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

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NOTE: Audio versions of Lugar’s comments are available at **1-800-545-1267, press 407 for the Lugar mailbox** or on the web at: **www.senate.gov/src/radio/lugar**