

OMB Director Nussell testified before the Budget Committee and Rep. McGovern questioned him about the budget cuts that will impact the hungry here in the U.S. His remarks, as prepared, are pasted below.

Mr. Nussle –

Unfortunately, it's becoming clear that the stimulus package working through the Senate will not include Food Stamps. When the House was investigating its own stimulus package, experts across the political and ideological spectrum agreed that we must develop a plan that helps the most vulnerable people and households and that allows currency to flow. Many of these experts believe strongly that any stimulus plan should include a temporary increase in Food Stamp benefits. But, like I said, it looks like food stamps will not be part of the package.

That's a shame because not only are Food Stamps a good stimulus for our economy, they serve an even more important purpose – they feed hungry people. And that's the real issue here.

According to the Bush administration's own data, hunger is getting worse in this country. The USDA report on food insecurity released at the end of last year states that more than 35.5 million people went hungry in our country in 2006 – an increase of more than 300,000 from 2005.

We have a federal safety net in place to address these issues. This safety net – the Food Stamp program, Meals on Wheels, school meals and the emergency food system – is proven and it does its job when properly funded and maintained.

Yet your budget goes directly after this safety net. Under the Bush Administration and when Congress was under Republican control, these programs were unwarranted targets. Having said that, I also want to stress that there are many Members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle, who did their best to protect these programs from being unfairly targeted.

Republican reconciliation bills tried to eliminate food stamps for many of the people who relied on them. Thankfully, those proposals were defeated and we are now in the process of expanding food stamps and other anti-hunger programs to reach the tens of millions of Americans who need them.

But this budget does the same kind of things those old reconciliation bills tried to do. This budget, your budget, underfunds food stamps and WIC. You say you're increasing WIC, but those so-called increases come from actually cutting other WIC programs and services. You low-ball other programs that help low-income families like LIHEAP and child care – that help mitigate the rising costs of food and utilities that are sapping the resources of many low-income Americans.

And, once again, this budget eliminates funding for key nutrition programs, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. In fact, this is the third time the Bush Administration budget has proposed these cuts. Congress has twice before rejected these proposals – once by a Republican-controlled Congress and once by a Democratic-controlled Congress.

- Why do you persist in continuing to make these proposals when the Congress on a bipartisan basis has clearly rejected them, making it very clear that we want these programs continued because of their value to so many hungry Americans?
- Why would an Administration that is concerned about stimulating the economy choose to cutback spending for food assistance programs that stimulate the economy in the food and agriculture sector and help hundreds of thousands of low-income Americans who are dependent upon them?
- Why would a Congress that has twice rejected these proposals and is currently working closely with the Administration on an economic stimulus package support proposals that will reduce food assistance to nearly 800,000 needy Americans?

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