



U.S. Congressman Joe Baca

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Contact: Michael Levin (202) 225-6161, Linda Macias (202) 225-6161

HOUSE MINORITY LAWMAKERS CALL FOR PROTECTION OF FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Letter Points Out that Their Votes Will be Needed to Pass Next Farm Bill

Washington, DC – The entire membership of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) and the board of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) urged House Agriculture Committee leaders to protect the Food Stamp Program so it can continue to prevent hunger and provide a nutritionally adequate diet for millions across the country.

Signing a letter initiated by Congressmen Joe Baca (D-California) and Bennie Thompson (D-Mississippi) and released today, the group of almost 70 members of the U.S. House of Representatives voiced their concerns about proposed funding cuts that the Agriculture Committee will consider in order to meet budget goals. They also noted that the reauthorization of the farm subsidies bill in 2007 will require support from Members like themselves who generally represent districts where constituents benefit more from nutrition programs than agricultural subsidies.

Rep. Baca said, "For the members of these caucuses, funding for food stamps and nutrition programs is a key priority. We care about agriculture, but not at the expense of providing assistance to feed hungry children."

Baca serves as the 1st Vice Chair of CHC and is the Ranking Member of the Agriculture Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Food Stamp Program.

Rep. Thompson said, "Once again, we are forced to meet the Administration's proposed cuts to the Food Stamp Program with a common-sense approach. For the millions of families and children receiving food stamp assistance, these cuts are matters of life and death. We should not turn our backs on those who can least help themselves."

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture explains on its web site, "The Food Stamp Program serves as the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food..." The program serves millions of Americans who are disadvantaged, including a disproportionate number of Blacks, Hispanics and Asian Americans. As the American economy has struggled, the number of applicants and recipients has increased each year since 2001.

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The Tri-Caucus group seeks to limit, if not prevent altogether, cuts in funding for food stamps. President Bush had proposed eliminating \$9 billion over five years from agricultural programs, with no more than 7% of the cuts coming from the Food Stamp Program. Under this year's budget reconciliation process, the Agriculture Committee needs to make \$3 billion in overall cuts, and the signers of the letter favor protecting the Food Stamp Program, by limiting cuts in funding to 7% if it must be cut at all. However, some agriculture groups favor making 60% of the overall cuts from food stamp and other nutrition programs.

Rep. Baca said, "The federal budget this year was bad, reflecting misguided Republican priorities, including tax cuts for companies moving jobs overseas. We should not even be contemplating cuts to any agriculture program."

In addition to their opposition to potentially severe budget cuts in the Food Stamp Program, the minority lawmakers expressed concern about threats to the national nutrition guarantee when the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program is reauthorized and efforts to undermine immigrant eligibility for food stamps. Rep. Baca and former Rep. Eva Clayton led the fight in 2002 to restore the eligibility of legal permanent residents for food stamps.

Tri-Caucus Members have frequently worked together to protect America's most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations and to ensure an adequate safety net exists.

Rep. Mike Honda (D-California), CAPAC Chair, said, "As the first line of defense against hunger, the Food Stamp Program enables low-income families in the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and other communities to buy nutritious food and stave off the problems that accompany limited dietary options. In alliance with my colleagues on the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus, we will work to preserve this critically important program."

Rep. Mel Watt, (D-North Carolina), CBC Chair, said, "The Food Stamp Program serves a critical need for millions of struggling families, seniors and people with disabilities to combat against hunger and malnutrition. The CBC believes it would be offensive for the Agriculture Committee or Congress to adopt a reconciliation bill that cuts the Food Stamp Program more deeply than what President Bush has proposed. It would further increase the disparities gap between the wealthy and those who have a difficult time providing for their basic food needs."

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