

CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

Statement in Support of CHAIRMAN JIM MCGOVERN'S ACTION TO END HUNGER IN AMERICA AND SUPPORTING THE RULES COMMITTEE DRAFT REPORT ABOUT ENDING HUNGER IN AMERICA: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THE POLITICAL WILL TO SUCCEED

November 14, 2022



Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the committee:

As a senior member of the House Committees on Judiciary, Budget, and Homeland Security, a longtime Member of the House Hunger Caucus, and as the Representative for Texas' 18th Congressional District whose progenitors are iconic leaders who fought to end hunger in the U.S. and globally, I am proud to support your effort, Chairman McGovern, and the efforts of the entire Rules Committee to address and solve the epidemic of hunger in America. In so doing, I am continuing the historic legacy of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, who was a champion for human dignity and fought for the rights of all people regardless of race, gender, heritage, or economic status, and Congressman Mickey Leland, who worked tirelessly to raise awareness of, and fight for, policies to end hunger around the globe and who, tragically, died in a plane crash while working to end world hunger on a relief mission in Ethiopia.

I stand with each of you and with the advocates in your consolidated report who are working to solve the epidemic of food insecurity. I am committed to doing my part to make sure that everyone has enough food to eat and nutrition to thrive.

It is hard to believe that hunger exists in America, the land of plenty and agricultural preeminence. However, according to the USDA, more than 34 million people, including 9 million children, in the United States are food insecure, which means they don't have reliable access to enough nutritious food to lead a healthy life. In Texas, more than 4.5

million people struggle with hunger, and in South Texas, one in five households report some type of food insecurity, lacking consistent access to food. The pandemic has only exacerbated food insecurity among families with children and communities of color, who already faced hunger at much higher rates before the pandemic. These statistics are alarming, but they are also a call to action.

The fact is that no one in America should go hungry. In America, the term food desert should be nonapplicable. To achieve this end, we must address the structural barriers of hunger and investigate how to create better systems, supply chain and otherwise, that will ensure access to fresh and healthy food in every local community. We must tackle this problem legislatively and administratively. We must continue to invest in programs like Special Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that provide critical assistance to families in need.

Among the many legislative programs I have initiated, advocated for, and supported include funding at the highest level for SNAP, full funding for WIC, \$330 million for Emergency Food Assistance Program, \$30 million for Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), \$22 million for Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and \$55 million for Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU). The hearings that Chairman McGovern led have elevated these programs on the national agenda, and today's report coalesces efforts to raise the issue of hunger in America to the forefront where it belongs until we find a solution.

In my district, the organization Urban Harvest has developed an innovative model that uses refrigerated vans to bring fresh produce directly from local farmers to local communities most in need. Glen Miracle of Laughing Frog Farm says "Urban Harvest offers those of us who grow food the opportunity to connect with the small, but growing, number of people that want to improve their relationship with food, and its inevitable effects on our health." We need to support and grow these local solutions in order to make an impact on food insecurity.

Numerous organizations throughout my district operate community gardens. Community gardens not only provide an opportunity for people to connect with their food source, learn how to grow it, and share the harvest, they also create a sense of community and provide fresh produce. I am committed to supporting these efforts and will continue to work with my colleagues to find practical solutions that make healthy food accessible to all.

Technology can play a key role in the process as well. By using data and analytics, we can map out the most efficient supply chains and uncover any mismatches in supply and demand, in real-time, and redirect essential or excess food to those areas most in need. Earlier this year, when baby formula was in short supply nationwide for months due to pandemic-related supply chain issues, as the founder and Chair of the Congressional Children's Caucus, I worked to address the needs of women, families, and children by directing baby formula to places where demand was surging and unfulfilled. There is no

reason that a crisis at one baby formula plant should create a shortage throughout the system. We must ensure food security through redundancy as well. We must create a system that ensures all those who are hungry can get access to the best available food when they need it.

We must never lose sight of the fact that each individual, through determination, has the power to help alleviate hunger, making a difference in their neighborhood and city. We can each do our part to help reduce hunger in our communities by donating food to local food banks or volunteering our time at a soup kitchen or food pantry.

Good and healthy food should be a right, not a privilege. It is our duty as a nation to ensure that all our citizens have access to the basic human need of nutritious food. We know that quality nutrition is the foundation for good health, academic success, and employment. It is also an essential element of our national identity. It is a fundamental right that should not be determined based on where one lives, one's race, or one's economic status. Chairman McGovern is doing the hard work of government to bring together the necessary stakeholders, identify the gaps, and elevate the most effective solutions.

Ultimately, as Americans, the effort to defeat food insecurity is a reflection of our values. President Biden has stated that "we are in a fight to restore the soul of our nation", and, in this context, that includes recommitting ourselves to recognizing the common humanity in each other and acting on that common humanity to ensure we all are food secure. This Administration is committed to working tirelessly to ensure that all Americans have access to the nutritious food they need in order to live happy, healthy, and productive lives. I am proud to collaborate with President Biden's administration and leaders like Chairman McGovern, and I pledge my full support to the efforts to solve the hunger crisis and fix food insecurity.

This is a fight we can and must win. By acting on our shared values through the work of this committee, and by the heroic work being done by food security advocates featured in the committee's report, "Ending Hunger in America: Challenges, Opportunities and the Political Will to Succeed", we will make great strides to ensure that no one in America goes hungry.

I know that my predecessors Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland would be proud of the work that is being done in the United States House Rules Committee. I am sure that with sustained effort, we will find solutions to the hunger crisis, drastically reduce food insecurity, and enable all Americans to thrive.

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