

I rise today in support of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (S. 3307), which will reauthorize important child nutrition programs and raise the nutritional standards for food served to our school children in a variety of ways.

The number of obese children in the United States has tripled in the last 30 years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that as of 2008 almost 32 percent of our children were either overweight or obese. Obesity leaves children at risk of developing adult diseases such as hypertension and Type-2 diabetes, and at increased risk of developing heart disease and suffering from strokes and cancer. A study by Mission: Readiness, an organization of retired senior military leaders, found that more than 9 million young adults are too overweight to join the Armed Services.

In a strange paradox, while childhood obesity has reached epidemic levels in the United States, so too has childhood hunger. As of 2008, more than 49 million people in the United States were living in food insecure households, and more than 16 million of those were children. That's more than 22 percent of all children living in America. Making matters worse, more than 17 million people were living in households that were considered to have "very low food security," a USDA term meaning one or more people in the household were hungry over the course of the year because of the inability to afford enough food. In 2008, the number of people suffering from "very low food security" was double the number in that category in 2000.

We are long overdue in taking decisive action to combat these problems, and I am pleased that we are taking an important step today. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act includes many provisions to combat childhood hunger. The bill increases the number of children funded in the school meal program by using existing data to directly certify eligible children. In addition, it provides funds to states to establish and expand school breakfast programs in communities with high levels of children living in poverty. It would also expand the availability of summer food service programs so more children have access to nutritious meals year round. To help reduce hunger outside of school, the bill would allow Child and Adult Care Food Program providers nationwide to be reimbursed for providing a meal to at-risk children after school. Altogether, the hunger-prevention provisions in the bill would provide more than 21 million additional meals to at-risk children.

The legislation would also combat obesity by making the food served at school healthier and more nutritious. It requires that all food served at school meet updated standards that reflect recommendations made by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences National Research Council. This will finally remove junk food from schools and ensure that the only meal some children get each day is nutritious. Further, the legislation increases the reimbursement rate for schools that comply with these new nutrition standards. This represents the first increase in reimbursement rates in 30 years. The bill also requires schools participating

in the school lunch program to offer drinking water in the location where meals are served, while they are being served, and to establish school wellness policies.

I am particularly pleased that my legislation, the Farm to School Improvements Act, is included in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. The farm to school provisions in the bill establish a program through which schools, agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, agencies and Indian Tribes can obtain competitive matching grants to increase the use of locally-supplied foods in schools participating in the school lunch or breakfast programs. Priority in awarding the grants goes to projects that, among other things, make local food products available on the school menu, serve a high proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, and incorporate experiential nutrition education activities such as farming and growing school gardens in curriculum planning. The bill provides \$40 million in mandatory finding over 8 years to support farm to school programs.

When he testified in July at the hearing on this legislation in the House Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said that we cannot "delay the connection between the farm and school." It is a crucial link between children and their food supply. Similarly, Beth Feehan, Director of the New Jersey Farm to School Network said "[w]e can't be penny wise and a pound foolish with this one. What we feed children will determine their health as adults--how well they learn and perform in all areas of their lives. . . . When our military states that [it] cannot command enough recruits due to the increase in obesity in the eligible population who can serve, it is time to take a serious look at what we are feeding children and make improvements now." I am pleased that we are doing that today.

In these challenging fiscal times, every dollar we spend must not only meet immediate needs but also make lasting improvements for the future. Because school food programs currently provide more than half of the daily nutrition for many children, it is vital that these meals be healthy ones. Farm to school programs increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables to improve our children's daily nutrition and can lead to permanent improvements in their diets and eating habits.

Farm to School programs also benefit small- and mid-sized agricultural producers by providing access to consistent markets, making them a great stimulus for the local economy. Currently, 10,000 farm to school programs exist, but there are 94,000 public and nonprofit private schools operating school lunch programs that could offer one.

I would like to take a moment to thank Megan Lott of the Community Food Security Coalition, Beth Feehan, the Director of the New Jersey Farm to School Network, and Gabrielle Serra of the House Committee on Education and Labor for helping to make this program a reality.

I was delighted when the House recognized the critical importance of farm-to-school programs by passing my House Resolution 1655 in November, to establish October as National Farm to School Month. Today, I am pleased to support the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.