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EXAMINE NUTRITION ISSUES SURROUNDING SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MARCH 6, 2001

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REVIEW OF NUTRITION AND THE SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2001

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9 a.m. in room 216, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Richard G. Lugar.

[Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Lugar, Harkin, Lincoln, Baucus, Cochran, Stabenow, Allard, and Leahy.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR, A U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Agriculture Committee is called to order.

We are very pleased once again to have such a wonderful turnout of those deeply interested in the school lunch program in our country. We look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses. Today, our committee will hear that testimony on Federal child nutrition programs and recommendations for improvements.

These programs are among the committee's highest priorities. Adequate and appropriate nutrition for children, seniors, and all Americans is a matter, first of all, of public health. It is especially important for children, in their early physical development, their performance in school, and their preparation for adulthood.

The school lunch program, the breakfast, special milk and after-school snack, summer food service, child and adult care feeding programs are all vital components of our national efforts to encourage healthy eating habits that will hopefully guide food choices throughout life.

March is National Nutrition Month, an annual nutrition education campaign, designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices, and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

It is always a distinct pleasure to hold this hearing to receive testimony from one of the vanguards of America's child nutrition organizations, the American School Food Service Association. The committee is pleased to be able to hold this hearing to coincide with the presence of members of the association in Washington.

I note, Ms. Hurt, that your testimony lists the Hoosiers present today, and I am happy to see so many representatives here from

Indiana. I understand that there are nine, and I hope that they are appropriately seated.

Ms. HURT. They are.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Great, welcome, and we appreciate your presence.

We need everyone to be concerned about children's eating habits. Unfortunately, sometimes, they make poor food choices, as do many adults, for that matter.

Many do not exercise enough. As a result, many of our children are much heavier than ever before. These behaviors set lifetime patterns that, unless corrected, put them at risk for heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and stroke, just to name a few of these dreadful diseases.

The Federal Child Nutrition Programs provides an opportunity to help guide sound food choices for school-age children. These programs, coupled with nutrition education and other efforts, can help address the nutritional needs of young people.

The efforts of your association are appreciated, as we work together toward helping Americans live healthier lives. We will be pleased to hear your suggestions, as always, on ways to improve our programs.

We look forward also to your comments on a proposed International School Lunch Program. On July 27 of last year, I chaired a hearing of this committee to receive testimony from Ambassador George McGovern and Senator Bob Dole on the proposed international school lunch feeding program.

Senators Leahy, Harkin, Durbin, Cochran, and I are deeply interested in moving ahead with legislation on this issue, as appropriate. The Agriculture Committee staffs have been working with other Senate offices to design such a program.

Last year, President Clinton announced the Global Food for Education Initiative, a $300 million pilot program, based on the McGovern/Dole initiative. Senators Harkin, Durbin, and I have asked the General Accounting Office to review the aspects of this initiative, which will be helpful in our own legislative initiative.

As other Senators appear, I will ask them for comments and, indeed, the distinguished Ranking Member has appeared, right on time. I will ask now Senator Harkin for his opening comments to this hearing.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Lugar can be found in the appendix on page 28.]

STATEMENT OF HON. TOM HARKIN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM IOWA, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Senator HARKIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I am glad we have this much interest in one of the most important aspects of the education of our children, and that is an adequate and nutritional diet.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, on these programs, and with the Ranking Democratic Member of the Nutrition Subcommittee, Senator McConnell, and also Senator Leahy.

Many groups and many people come to Washington to make their case to Congress. I cannot think of any group that comes here with more joy, enthusiasm and commitment, than the members of the American School Food Service Association.

Their work providing sound nutrition is critical to the future of our children and our nation. They do it with real dedication. Our job is to provide the resources and support they need to succeed.

I very much appreciate the testimony today from Marilyn Hurt, the President of the ASFSA; and the attendance of the Iowa School Food Service Association Delegation, Carolyn Klein, President; her husband, Perry; Marilyn Wilkins, President-Elect; Diane Duncan Goldsmith, our Vice President; Teresa Niece, our Legislative Chair; and Elizabeth Hanna, Regional Director for the ASFSA; and also, Patty Harding, John Larson, and Dale Johnson.

I especially want to mention my interest in promoting a stronger school breakfast program. For learning and good nutrition, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. Perhaps if we could turn the clock back 60 years, maybe we should have started with a school breakfast program, and then gone into a school lunch program after that.

Be that as it may, the school lunch program has proven its worth. Now I think we have enough data, over the last few years, from our school breakfast pilot to indicate, I think, without any doubt, that a nationwide, full-service school breakfast program is the next step that we must take. We now have full funding for these demonstration projects, so we have to get the thing under way for school breakfasts.

Local school food service operations and USDA have made great strides in improving the nutritional quality of school meals. Of all of the remarks that I make this morning, this is the one that I want to focus on. It is a real shame that the progress that all of you here have worked so hard to accomplish is being undermined daily by the marketing to our children of competing foods of little or no nutritional value.

[Applause.]

Senator HARKIN. Currently, the USDA has only weak rules to prevent the sales of soda and candy from interfering with school meals. Now we learn that schools are even ignoring those weak rules.

It is not right that taxpayer dollars go out to support sound nutrition, only to have that sound nutrition undercut right in the schools, themselves. This is an important issue, and one that our committee wants to address.

There was an article in the Washington Post here last week about a couple of local schools, and how the vending machines were open in the morning, open during lunch hour, and how much money the schools were getting from those vending machines in order to pay for sports and other things.

We find ourselves in a terrible situation, where schools that are under-funded, that need money, now are attached by an umbilical cord to these vending machines, that put out candy and soda, potato chips, the very things that these kids do not need.

They get all sugared up in the morning. They stay sugared up through lunch, and then we wonder why we have hyper-active kids, and why they are not learning.

Now I thought, Mr. Chairman, that we had clamped down on this. I thought we had a rule. I thought we had a law that said these vending machines are not to be open until after lunch. I would like to get into that a little bit later. I thought we had determined that some time ago, and that these vending machines were not to be accessible and available until after the lunch services were over with.

If that is not the rule and if that is not the law, it ought to be the law. Those vending machines should not be accessible to any kid, at a minimum, until after the lunches are over with. In fact, I would say that we probably ought to get the vending machines totally out of the school.

[Applause.]

Senator HARKIN. Some people say, well, these kids, if you do that, they will not eat. Well, again, if we start early in life, we are all products of our upbringing and our education. If we start with kids early in life, and teach them, and I am talking about in elementary school, about what good nutrition is and what it does for you, and how healthy it makes you; and if children grow up like that and are learning that, then they will be more prone to have these kinds of meals when they are in high school.

I do not buy the argument, Mr. Chairman and all of you, that if we take those vending machines out or lock them up until after the lunch hour, that somehow these kids are not going to eat.

They will, I think. If we promote and we educate and we support them and their families with good nutrition information, and good food that not only is nutritious, but also palatable to their tastes, which can be done, I believe they will.

If those vending machines are there, and they can get the soda and they can get the candy and they can get the chips, that is where they are going to go, because that is where all the advertising leads them to.

I hope, Mr. Chairman, that we can make some strides this year, and especially in the next Farm bill. Nutrition is going to be an important part of that Farm bill. I hope we can make some strides to turn the corner on this. It is unconscionable what is happening in these schools today, with these kids and the accessibility of vending machines.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to express my strong support for the Global Food for Education Initiatives proposed by former Senators McGovern and Dole, and begun by President Clinton. Again, I think this concept of a worldwide school lunch program for every kid in the world is something that we ought to be about and we ought to be supporting.

I have spent a lot of my time working on trying to end child labor, to get kids out of these work places, in various places around the globe. One of the best magnets that we can have to get kids out of the work place and get them into school is to provide them with at least one fully nutritious meal every day.

If you do that, you will get the kids out of these work places; you will get the parents seeing that they will have an advantage. Their kids will be well fed and we will get them into schools.

I am hopeful that the United States, along with other producing nations, can support a global effort, beginning as soon as possible, at least in providing some demonstration projects in other countries, where we can provide at least one fully nutritious meal to kids in schools, in less developed nations.

Mr. Chairman, again, I thank you for holding this very important hearing. As you can tell from my comments, I feel very strongly about this issue, as I know you do, Mr. Chairman.

We have worked together on this issue for a long time. Hopefully, we can make some progress with this issue of the vending machines in schools. I know it is a tough issue, but it is one that I think we are going to have confront head on.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Harkin can be found in the appendix on page 30.]

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much, Senator Harkin. Let me indicate that we do look forward to working together, as we progress in the nutrition section of our Farm bill.

Let me ask, respectfully, of our very large audience today, that you respond with more reserve. I do not want to suppress your enthusiasm for Senator Harkin, however.

[Laughter.]

Senator HARKIN. It was not for me. It was for the ideas that I was espousing.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. I understand, but to the extent possible, let us sort of hold it down to a dull roar. If you want to applaud, however, Senator Lincoln, that will be permissible.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. I now want to call on the distinguished Senator from Arkansas. Yes, Senator Harkin?

Senator HARKIN. Mr. Chairman, if I might, I have to apologize to all my friends here, and to you, Mr. Chairman. We all have these conflicts around here. I am also on the Education Committee, and we are having a big meeting this morning on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I am going to have to excuse myself from this, and go over to that meeting. That is the only reason I would be leaving.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for giving that very important opening statement.

Senator Lincoln.

STATEMENT OF HON. BLANCHE L. LINCOLN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS

Senator LINCOLN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and as always, thanks to you and to Senator Harkin for addressing such a critical issue.

I am so pleased to see that this issue is on the minds of many other people, as well, from the wonderful crowd we have here in this hearing room. It is certainly indicative of what a critical issue it is, not only for our children, but for our nation.

As with most of the issues that we discuss on this committee, child nutrition is near and dear to my heart. With one in three children living in poverty in Arkansas, I can think of no greater service that our country can give these children than free or subsidized hot, nutritious meals at school.

We all know that nutrition is an important piece of absolutely everyone's well being. Studies show, and certainly, teachers have been telling us for years that children who eat well-balanced meals, especially a morning breakfast, do better academically.

I have a personal connection there. One of my sisters taught in the public schools in Arkansas. She had many challenges. She had not only a classroom of 31 students, but was teaching simultaneously kindergarten and first grade curriculum to 31 kids in one single room. I was always amazed.

When I asked her, how in the world did you do it, she said, these were not even her biggest challenges. She said that those children come to school, and they are hungry, they are sick sometimes because they are hungry; and she said, they are frightened.

I was amazed when she told me she left teaching. She said that the problem was, at the end of the day when she had bus duty, there were at least three children clinging to her legs saying, please do not make me go home.

Now it is unbelievable that there are children in such a state. If there is one thing that we can do for them, it should be a nutritious meal.

My sister kept peanut butter and crackers in her desk drawer for those who did come to school, and were not able to get a hot meal. She knew that it could improve them just a smidgen, in terms of their learning and their academic capabilities.

As more and more persons move off the welfare roles and they try to support themselves, the WIC and the school lunch programs are even more important. Over 91,000 women and children participate in the WIC program in Arkansas.

WIC is one of those prevention programs that is cost effective, in the long term, because it helps women have healthier babies.

Healthier babies means savings down the road in health care costs, both to families and to Government programs like Medicaid, which we are an enormous user of in Arkansas, as well. Child nutrition programs have far reaching effects. They are the safety net that women and children rely on.

I thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing, and I certainly look forward to your testimony from our distinguished witnesses today. I applaud all that have come today, not only as witnesses, but to witness the discussion of such a critical issue to our children and to our nation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Lincoln.

Senator Baucus, do you have an opening comment?

STATEMENT OF HON. MAX BAUCUS, A U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA

Senator BAUCUS. Yes, Mr. Chairman, and first, I want thank you very much for holding this hearing.

This is very important. You know, we can not always have hearings on every subject under the sun; but for you to decide to hold the hearing today on this subject, I think is testament to your leadership on the committee. I thank you very much for it.

I would also like to thank Ms. Hurt for her testimony today. Also, I want to compliment and thank Wanda Sand, who is President of the Montana School Food Association, as well as the Food Service Manager for Fairfield Public Schools. I want to thank her for her hard work, generally, for Montana kids.

Mr. Chairman, there is a lot of discussion these days about the need to improve our education system, and I support it. I very heartily favor all the efforts we have in our country to improve our education system. That is good, and we need to do a lot better.

We also need to remember to think about the needs of our kids in a much broader sense. A hungry child is a child who will not be learning, no matter how good the teacher is. Mr. Chairman, I have seen it. I have seen it, first hand, several times. It is sad. It is stunning. It just takes your breath away.

I have participated many times in the school lunch and breakfast programs. I am amazed at the number of kids who need those meals, and if they did not have those meals, would be going hungry. Clearly, it affects their learning.

It is amazing, Mr. Chairman. I mean, a lot of us in the Senate just do not know a lot about this. We lead perhaps sheltered lives, and we just do not see how much this goes on. There is real need in our country, and I just can not tell you, Mr. Chairman, how much it hit me, when I personally first hand saw the need in Montana schools.

It may be a little bit worse in our state, because we are a low per-capita income state, and our families are having a tougher time making ends meet. I am quite confident the situation is also true all over the country. It is not just in rural states like Montana.

I compliment the President, who often says he does not want to leave any child behind. We do not want to leave any children behind. I suggest that, in addition to intellectual learning, that nutrition is another part of the equation and one of the components that are necessary to make sure that children are not left behind.

I would just sum up, Mr. Chairman, by thanking you for the hearing. I hope this hearing highlights the need, so that our country does, in fact, pay more attention.

It is not only the school lunch programs and breakfast programs. It is programs like HeadStart. I spent a whole day as a teacher's aid at HeadStart one day. Man, I will tell you, before that, I was a strong supporter of HeadStart; no more. I am no longer a strong supporter of HeadStart. I am a fanatic supporter of HeadStart.

[Laughter.]

Senator BAUCUS. I wish that more Senators could have some of the same experiences and they, too, would be fanatic supporters of helping our kids.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you, Senator Baucus, for your very strong testimony this morning.

Senator Cochran.

Senator COCHRAN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for having this hearing. I am looking forward to the testimony of our witnesses. We always appreciate the advice and counsel that we get from the American School Food Service Association. We appreciate your being here, and we value your comments.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Stabenow, do you have an opening comment?

STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE STABENOW, A U.S. SENATOR FROM MICHIGAN

Senator STABENOW. Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate very much all of you being here. I see familiar faces. I had the opportunity to speak to this terrific organization last evening, and welcomed them to Washington, D.C. As I indicated last night, what you do is very important, and we are looking forward to your comments this morning.

I apologize in advance, Mr. Chairman. I am juggling two committees today, and will have to leave at some point for the Budget Committee. That certainly does not mean that I am not fully committed to what you are talking about. I look forward to working together.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Stabenow.

Senator Harkin is displaying another piece of evidence.

[Laughter.]

Senator HARKIN. Oh, that is an article, "Soft Drinks and Hard Facts." If you have not read it yet, read it.

The CHAIRMAN. It is a pleasure to welcome the distinguished panel before us this morning. I will say this, just for the sake of history, because this meeting becomes, in a way, a rally of the faithful each year.

Five years ago, the Federal National School Lunch Program was embattled, in large part, because a national debate was occurring. It occurred here in Congress, as to how the program should be administered.

There were a number of Members of the Congress, in the Senate and in the House, who genuinely felt that the programs would be best handled at the state level, and some even at the local level. Essentially, the Federal mandate for a school program, they felt, was less appropriate than in the past, or inappropriate altogether, depending upon the political philosophy, I suppose, as you take a look at the federalism issues.

We debated that in this committee, and in the House committee; but more generally, it was a debate outside of the committee. It was a sort of threshold debate at that time in the Congress in 1995.

I remember the situation vividly, and many of you who were involved do too. In fact, legislation , that would have terminated the Federal School Lunch Program passed both houses. A conference was held, and essentially, a conference report was circulated.

I had the unpleasant task, at that point, of being confronted with this matter at the moment, and this is simply anecdotal, as I was

Candidate for President. I was in various states, running in primaries and so forth.

Upon my return to Washington, I was confronted with the conference report that needed but two signatures on the Senate side to become law. Unfortunately, one of our colleagues signed, leaving just one signature remaining.

I took the position, and I think correctly, that the Federal School Lunch Program is appropriate, because this is a country in which our children really cannot determine which state in which they have residence, or where they were born, or where they are going to live. They are really dependent upon their families, their parents.

There needs to be some under-girdling safety net, as one nation, with all of our children. The ups and down and vagaries of various standards, state by state, really were inappropriate in this area.

I did not sign the report. As a result, that School Lunch Program change did not become law. By that thin hair, the Federal School Lunch Program continued.

[Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. Most people just assume there will always be a federal program; that there never really has been any particular threat. As a result, that is just as well.

We have, I think, very strong bi-partisan support, as is evidenced in this committee this morning. That is important, too. This must not become a partisan issue. It should be something in which all of us come together, in both parties on this committee, to try to listen carefully to how nutrition for our children can be improved; and as a matter of fact, maybe through the influence of these programs, nutrition for adults, too.

Your testimony is welcome this morning. I am going to call, first of all, upon Ms. Marilyn Hurt, the President of the American School Food Service Association of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Then my understanding is that those who accompanied her, namely, Ms. Marcia Smith, President-Elect of the American School Food Service Association of Bartow, Florida; Ms. Gaye Lynn MacDonald, Vice President of the American School Food Service Association of Bellingham, Washington; and Ms. Nancy Stiles, Chair of Public Policy and Legislative Committee, American School Food Service Association, from Hampton, New Hampshire will all make short comments, following the testimony by Ms. Hurt.

Please proceed with your testimony.

STATEMENT OF MARILYN HURT, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION

ACCOMPANIED BY:

MARCIA SMITH, PRESIDENT ELECT, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION

GAYE LYNN MAC DONALD, VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SCHOOL FUND SERVICE ASSOCIATION

NANCY STILES, CHAIR, PUBLIC POLICY 7 LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, AMERICAN FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION

Ms. HURT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the support that you give us. We, too, have a vivid memory of five years ago. Your support certainly helped us preserve this very important

program, and your understanding of our program is equally important.

As you indicated, I am Marilyn Hurt. I am President of the American School Food Service Association, and I am the Food Service Director in La Crosse, Wisconsin. You have introduced my colleagues, who are here with me. I also have several hundred of my closest friends behind me.

[Laughter.]

Ms. HURT. They are equally passionate and energetic and enthused about these programs.

Of course, we have a wonderful contingency here from Indiana, including the President, Bonnie Cooprider; and the President-Elect, Gayle Knafel, is here, as well as their Legislative Chair, who is Mark Miller. Mark is an industry member. He is General Chair of SFSPac, which provides our programs with safety and sanitation programs.

In addition, we have Barry Reese. I want to acknowledge Barry, because he works so hard on the American School Food Service Association's Public Policy and Legislative Committee.

We are pleased to have the Indiana contingency here with us, as well as a number of distinguished people from Iowa. I am sorry the Senator from Iowa had to leave this morning.

Once again, let me express my deep appreciation of you, Mr. Chairman, as well as the committee, for your commitment to these programs, because it has helped us preserve the programs, enrich the programs, and it certainly shows us your demonstrated commitment. On behalf of all of us here, and the entire American School Food Service Association, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, we have spent a great deal of time working on our long-range legislative goals. One of them that is very important to us is listed on our issue paper today. That is to provide all children with nutritionally adequate meals, at no charge to the child at the point of service.

Now we believe that all of us have a responsibility for feeding children, including our parents, our local school boards, our communities, our state governments, as well as the Federal Government. Together, we can certainly provide this to our children, to give them this nutritionally adequate meal.

We look forward to working with the new Secretary of Agriculture, Ms. Veneman, who will help us, we hope, explore these options for strengthening the programs.

The current Federal commitment is certainly significant, $6.5 billion each year, and it shows the support of Congress for our efforts. I want to thank the members of the committee for this commitment to providing nutritious meals to our children across this country.

However, I want to take the opportunity this morning to share with you some of the issues that we are dealing with, back home in the school districts. I am going to begin with nutrition education.

You know, we have been here to Congress in the past to talk about nutrition education in schools and the importance of nutrition education. We see something going on among our children. We are getting new reports on obesity and under-nutrition. These reports are alarming us. What we are seeing among our children is alarming us.

We believe that failure to confront this issue now is going to result in serious consequences to these young people, as they go into adulthood.

In addition to the acute health problems caused by epidemic obesity, economic costs are also to be considered, because of the medical expenditures that these individuals are going to be facing later in life, as well as lost work productivity. This cost could certainly be immense.

Nutrition is a risk factor, as you indicate, Mr. Chairman, with heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes. Symptoms of these diseases are appearing among our young people. We see children with diseases that are normally associated with adults.

At the request of Congress, USDA recently issued a report in which it recommends that we create a national nutrition education program. We are, of course, supportive of this.

Despite the size of the Federal commitment to child nutrition programs, the Government currently invests virtually nothing in nutrition education in schools and teaching our children the importance of the food that they consume and its impact on their long-term health.

ASFSA is a strong supporter of nutrition education, and we encourage Congress to consider legislation that could create an integrated nutrition education program. We suggest that this be in the amount of $50 million, which would be $1 for every school age child in this country.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the foods that are sold in schools today. Every day, there are foods sold in our schools that take kids away from the very nutritious National School Lunch Program.

As was pointed out in the February 27 issue of the Washington Post article last week, and we do have copies of this, on schools hooked on junk food, the students may be junk food junkies, but the schools are hooked, too. They are increasingly dependent on the revenue that soda and candy machines bring in each year.

This is a huge challenge for those of us in school nutrition programs. You know, on the one hand, we are out there providing these nutritious meals.

On the other hand, we are under a great deal of financial pressure from our school districts and our school boards to bring home break-even budgets, year after year. Yet, we have a great deal of competition for the foods that we are serving; so this compounds the pressure.

Some districts actually are told, you need to be a profit center. The school nutrition program needs to make money, and funds are transferred from the school nutrition program into the general fund for education. You can understand with that the pressure that we are under.

Then we find, outside the door of the cafeteria, principals, coaches, librarians, selling food in competition with our program, and they are not necessarily nutritious foods, to raise dollars for their education programs and the programs that they need in the schools.

Well, in the 1970's, Congress attempted to address this issue by giving the Secretary the authority to regulate the sale of competi-

tive foods, as Senator Harkin indicated. In 1983, the Appeals Court ruled that the Secretary's authority extended only to the time and place that the National School Lunch Program meals were being served.

We believe that the Secretary should have the discretion to regulate the sale of competitive foods throughout the school day, all day long throughout the school campus, while school is in session.

The USDA recently issued a report to Congress, which we would like to make part of the hearing record. The report describes the impact of these food sales on the National School Lunch Program. It pointed out several issues that arise, and I would like to mention those today, on how this affects the children.

[The information referred to can be found in the appendix on page 38 & 41.]

Ms. HURT. First, as we indicated earlier, these foods create diet-related health risks. Our school meals are certainly nutritious, and they are better than ever. Studies indicate that children who participate in the National School Lunch Programs receive more essential nutrients than children who do not.

These other foods that are being sold outside of the school cafeteria are frequently high in fat, high in calories, high in sugar, and have very few nutrients. The consumption of these foods, and it has been reported just in the last few weeks, leads to obesity among our young people, and certainly to other health problems.

Competitive foods adversely affect student participation in our programs, because these foods can be offered anywhere on campus. It is very convenient, and it is throughout the school day, whenever a child is hungry and might want something to eat. Many of our students consume those foods, rather than coming into the school cafeteria to consume our nutritious foods.

This, of course, leads to declining participation, which then has another impact on us economically, reduces the support that we receive from commodities, and reduces the cash support that we receive in addition.

These foods also that are sold outside the school cafeteria potentially stigmatize the students who are inside eating with us. These competitive foods are available to those kids who have money, and leaves out other students who are frequently eating with us.

ASFSA believes that the school food programs should be portrayed as reliable and nutritious food sources for all children, regardless of their income. All children need good nutrition. We need some help driving that message home.

These competitive foods send a mixed message to our children. You know, they go into the classroom, into health classes. They learn about good nutrition. They learn about the foods that they need to be consuming in order to have long-term health. Then they walk outside the door, go down the hallway, and here facing them are a bank of vending machines that are selling something else.

What kind of a message is that sending to these young people? Is it that this is just an academic exercise that is going on in the classroom, but you really do not have to practice it? We are concerned about the mixed message.

Based upon the findings of the USDA, recommended in their January 12 report to Congress, we recommend and will support an

act to strengthen the statutory language to ensure that all foods that are sold or served anywhere in school, during the school day, meet nutrition standards. We support this wholeheartedly. There needs to be a consistent policy for nutrition sold in schools.

Now I just want to spend a moment on bonus commodities. I know you are aware that in 1994, the National School Lunch Act was amended to ensure that schools receive at least 12 percent of the Federal lunch support in the form of USDA-purchased commodities.

In addition to this guaranteed minimum, schools routinely receive bonus commodities. These come from the agricultural surplus removal programs. Unfortunately, the formula was changed in 1999, so that all commodities receive, regardless of their budgetary source, is counted toward the minimum percentage requirement. This change resulted in fewer commodities.

Thanks to your leadership, Mr. Chairman, the Congress addressed the problem, albeit temporarily, by restoring the original commodity assessment method for fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2001.

However, without Congressional action, the program will revert back to the 1999 rule on this October 1. As a result, we would have a reduction in commodities into our schools by $55 million. Of course, this affects our agricultural community, as well as food banks across the nation. We support permanently extending last year's statutory remedy for this.

After-school snack programs have become important. After-school programs are important, and a number of our schools are now providing such programs for our children, so that they have projects and activities to be involved in, after school.

With so many parents working, we know that children otherwise go home to an empty house. In 1998, recognizing the value of offering nutritious foods at these after-school activities, Congress expanded the availability of the meal supplements to our after-school enrichment programs.

The current maximum reimbursement for this snack is only 55 cents, and I think my colleagues are going to address this today, because it simply does not cover the cost of the food, the labor, and the supplies that are needed to deliver the program.

What ASFSA would support is legislation that would require USDA to determine what is the actual cost of delivering the program, and then providing a reimbursement that would be equal to that amount.

In addition, ASFSA would like to see that states be reimbursed for the expenses of oversight of the snack program, using the State Administrative Expense, or SAE formula. The legislation that expanded authority for after-school snack programs did not adjust the SAE formula accordingly. ASFSA urges Congress to correct this inconsistency at a cost of about $70,000.

Finally, I do want to address the McGovern/Dole International School Lunch Program. There are, as you indicated, 300 million hungry children in the world, and an estimated 130 million of these children, mostly girls, do not attend school.

To quote the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, George McGovern, he says, "If education

is the key to development in the Third World, the school lunch is the key to unlocking the education door."

Of course, we have a model program in this nation, and we have learned how important this is to education of children, as has been mentioned here this morning.

We agree with the assessment. We applaud the last Administration's contribution of roughly $300 million in agricultural commodities for the International School Lunch Program that was proposed by Ambassador McGovern and Senator Bob Dole.

We look forward to working with the Bush Administration on this effort. We are pleased that President Bush has asked Ambassador McGovern to continue in his post.

In addition to providing a humanitarian use for surplus agricultural commodities, the International School Lunch Program draws children to the classroom, where they can receive the obvious benefits of an education.

The ISLP seeks to insure that all children have at least one nutritious meal every day. Furthermore, it is designed to foster self-sufficiency within participating countries, so they eventually will be able to administrate and fund these school food programs themselves. ASFSA supports legislation that would permanently authorize and fund the McGovern/Dole International School Lunch Program.

Before I conclude, I just would like to mention that this is National School Breakfast Week. In most of our districts across the country, we certainly are promoting and celebrating the school breakfast and its importance to the children, as it is an education tool.

In conclusion, I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for accommodating the American School Food Service Association with this hearing. We certainly appreciate it.

Now I would like to introduce my colleagues, beginning with Marcia Smith. She has some comments that she would also like to make.

Thank you very much for your attention and support.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hurt can be found in the appendix on page 31.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Hurt.

Ms. Smith.

STATEMENT OF MARCIA SMITH, PRESIDENT-ELECT, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION, BARTOW, FLORIDA

Ms. SMITH. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you again, on behalf of the American School Food Service Association, and to Senator Harkin and to all members of the committee, for allowing us to speak this morning.

I am Marcia Smith, and I am from a large district in Florida, with 50 schools participating in the after-school snack program.

We served almost 160,000 after-school snacks last year. Thank you for providing funding for this program. It has been very well received by the students, parents, and operators of the after-school program.

Unfortunately, food and labor costs continue to escalate. In addition, students want variety, and it is becoming very difficult to purchase snacks that add wholesome variety, without costing more money. Therefore, we are recommending that USDA conduct a study on what the after-school snacks are costing.

We want to continue the after-school snack program, and we want more districts to become involved with the program. We know it is working. I would just like to illustrate by sharing a short story with you.

A teacher who operates the program in a school in our district called and said, "Thank you for the gift, Mrs. Smith." When I asked, "What do you mean by the gift?" she proceeded to tell me that by Food Service providing the after- school snack, that it had allowed her more time to work on activities for the after-school tutoring program.

She no longer had to make trips to the grocery store. She no longer to worry about bugs in her classroom, because she no longer had to store food. She also had more space to store her teaching materials.

She also proceeded to tell me that she was a parent whose child participates in the program. She wanted me to know that it was very comforting to her that when she got home, she could take the time to prepare a hot meal. She had a growing boy, and I do too. Of course, the first thing that he would do was grab anything that he could find, as soon as he walked in the door.

Once again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to share the importance of the after-school snack program. It really has become a very important part of the educational day.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Smith.

Ms. MacDonald.

STATEMENT OF GAYE LYNN MAC DONALD, VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION, BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

Ms. MACDONALD. Yes, thank you so much Mr. Chairman and to the other members of the committee. I would just like to say, on behalf of the American School Food Service Association, how much we appreciate the bi-partisanship of this committee, and especially in support of our issues.

I would like to focus my remarks today on nutrition education. As you have heard, current dietary patterns of American children range from obesity to under-nutrition; the results of too much food, not enough food, and in a majority of instances, poor food choices.

ASFSA is asking your help in addressing these critical dietary patterns by providing funding for the development of a comprehensive, coordinated nutrition education program in schools across America.

In schools, students need to hear and see consistent messages about healthy nutrition practices; practices that are modeled in meals provided through the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, the After-school Snack Program and others; reinforced through classroom and cafeteria activities; and

delivered in an overall school environment, promoting a healthy focus.

America's students need to be educated about positive nutrition habits on a consistent basis. Currently, most nutrition education efforts are concentrated in the second grade, the fourth grade, and the sixth grade.

We know that it should be an ongoing process. They need education not only in positive nutrition habits, but they need education on how to make better food choices by being informed consumers.

Many of us here today work with our teachers to provide classroom nutrition education. Nothing is more rewarding than getting letters from students praising carrots, green peppers, kiwi, physical activity, or how to outsmart fat cells. However, these efforts may be hit and miss, a grade level and classroom, here or there.

Habits learned in childhood do last a lifetime. A fresh approach to delivery of nutrition education must include a funded component for state and local infrastructure.

ASFSA encourages and supports collaborative efforts to design and deliver meaningful nutrition education programs. ASFSA, USDA, and the Department of Education would make a fine core team.

Hungry children can not learn, either in school or in life, and neither can unhealthy children. A strong Federal commitment to a fresh, new comprehensive coordinated nutrition education program is crucial to our nation's youth. It will assure a maximum return on the significant Federal investment in school meal and education programs.

Please join with us to ensure a strong future for America: healthy, informed children and youth adults, ready to learn.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. MacDonald.

Ms. Stiles.

STATEMENT OF NANCY STILES, PUBLIC POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION, HAMPTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Ms. STILES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, and all members of the committee. I am absolutely delighted to be here with you today.

Last year, ASFSA established its long-range legislative goals. I was privileged to serve on that task force. Marilyn has addressed one of those long-range goals this morning in her testimony. That is that we would provide nutritionally adequate meals at no charge to the child at the point of service.

In developing that long-range goal, the intent was not to develop a fully federally funded program, but a shared responsibility with state, local, and parental funding sources.

Presently, the IRS collects financial data at the Federal level. States also collect that income data, as well as other departments at the state level, that identify families with minimal income sources.

In the last few years, the data collected on the school lunch application has been used for a variety of funding sources for other programs. We would like to work with the Congress, the child nu-

trition authorizing committees, and Secretary Veneman, to explore possible options to accomplish these same goals.

We believe that not charging the child at the point of service will be efficient, accountable, and allow us to focus our efforts on quality programming.

We believe there is a real opportunity here. We would like to streamline this process for financial data collection, and we would very much look forward to working with you, this committee, on those opportunities, and begin that dialog as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you for your testimony.

We will now ask you to respond to our comments and questions. We will limit these to 5 minutes per Senator. We will have another round, if people are not able to answer or raise their questions in that period of time.

Let me just simply start by indicating that I have recently participated in a conference of health professionals, 1,000 people who came to Washington and heard Dr. Kenneth Cooper of the Cooper Clinic give dramatic charts with regard the health of individuals across all ages.

The thing that was striking about Dr. Cooper's testimony and the data from his laboratories, now published in various medical journals, was an absolute positive correlation between obesity and heart disease; between obesity, low density cholesterol, lipro proteins, and heart disease. It simply had no deviation. A straight line does not necessarily reflect a correlation between obesity and other outcomes.

Furthermore, the testimony of others indicates that, arguably, on body mass index measurements, a majority of Americans are overweight. Over a quarter of Americans are severely obese, to the point of having a health problem. Now that is twenty-five percent of all Americans.

The shocking aspect, and you have touched upon this, is the incidents of these conditions in children. The data, really, I suspect, is available, but we would like to have this for our committee.

As is now evident, children, who was a group have not really been considered subjects for heart disease research, are developing low density lipro proteins, very bad ratios in the cholesterol measurements, and conditions that clearly are going to lead to diabetes or other health problems fairly early in life.

This is a serious predicament. In part, it is a predicament of prosperity in the world, and the availability of food and of food choices.

A lot has been said this morning about these choices, and how at least they might be restricted in some ways. We know that food choices are made in many cases outside of schools; quite apart from those for which you are responsible.

The educational component, however, for which you do take responsibility, and for which we have some responsibility here to help you, is critical to that choice making. As you have pointed out, it is not a second, fourth, or sixth grade proposition.

This is a lifetime challenge for Americans who spend billions of dollars on weight control programs, on magazines designed to instruct them on how to resist the temptations of life that are all

around them, including bad nutritional choices. It is a serious health choice.

The bottom line in the presentation of Dr. Cooper and others is that, unfortunately, because of their pattern of food choices, Americans will incur health expenses that are truly exorbitant. These cost will test our Medicare system. They will test our public health systems. They will test the budgets, really, in most families, as they try to address health problems resulting from very poor nutrition choices.

Now this is beyond the purview of today's hearing, because we are talking about food and nutrition, but exercise is an important component. Likewise, one could add adequate sleep.

After you consider these three things which affect children and all of us, the question is, how can a program be designed really to benefit children. How can a program be designed to make certain that not only do children have nutrition sufficient to perform in the classroom, to make healthy lifestyle choices generally. This means expanding our horizons considerably and thinking about lifestyle choices in education.

That is one of your emphases. How we do that, how that is an integral part of the various other educational requirements is not clear. That is something that we all have to work on.

Finally, let me just mention that I have enthusiasm, as I have indicated, and Senator Harkin has and others will, for the International School Lunch Program. Our hearing was filled with idealism and that is important.

It also was filled with the problems of administering a School Lunch Program in many countries around the world. Now we have to go in with pretty clear eyes because, in fact, the testimony frequently indicated that the commodity bulk foods and other surpluses we have are really not needed. Instead, countries want to monetize the donated food to provide various things that they feel are even more essential than the foods themselves.

Well, in essence, it is a form of foreign assistance, or foreign aid, which may be very valuable. Monetizing food donations is something different than the conception that many people have of surplus foods going which is consumed by hungry people. The administration of such an alternative you know, from your own school programs, is complex.

Now many of the lessons learned in American school meal service, and these you can help us with, are applicable abroad. The NGO's and the other groups that have dealt with this in our country probably would be very helpful in that respect, too.

I just want to say, as we proceed along this line, I am trying to raise questions about physically how we do it; how the goods are moved, and who does what. The goal is to avoid a national scandal, in which the American people say, "this is not exactly what we thought was occurring." We were all in favor of the humanitarian aspects, but not in favor of a boondoggle, here or abroad.

Now in New Albany, Indiana last summer, I found a summer food program like you described. Different states serve in greater percentages of eligible children than others.

Here in the District of Columbia, my information indicates about one-half of eligible children have participated in a summer food

program. In Indiana, the percentage was much closer to 10 percent, not 50 percent. I tried to discover the dilemmas.

Now most of summer programs are administered by Park Departments, by other branches of government, sometimes in coordination with school systems and on school premises. Looking at the National scene, programs managers still administrative obligations that may be burdensome.

Your guidance in regard to how we make the program more appealing to potential sponsors more user friendly would be helpful. Sometimes the challenge is how to get the information out to civil governments, in addition to school governments or others who might be a helpful sponsor.

This is a gap, as many have pointed out over the years. We try to do a good job for eight or nine months of the school year, but suddenly at that point, in May or June, the door closes, and the children are sort of left to themselves. They have many of the same needs during that summer. Many of us, including yourselves, are mindful that we need to think of how we can strengthen the summer food service program.

Let me just call a cease-fire on my own part now, because I have taken, I am sure, more than the five minutes that I have allotted to other members.

I will turn to my distinguished colleague, Senator Leahy, a longtime champion of the School Lunch Program; not only a champion of it, but a practitioner, therefore, and a former Chairman of our committee.

Senator Leahy.

STATEMENT OF HON. PATRICK J. LEAHY, A U.S. SENATOR FROM VERMONT

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was struck when I heard my good friend, Senator Lugar, talk about the need for exercise and nutrition and sleep. I was thinking about whether we could get that in for the 100 Senators and, even more importantly, for their staffs who work even longer hours than we do.

I tried to work out the exercise bit last year. I took up skydiving.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. I am serious. I actually did.

This year, though, we are in a 50/50 Senate. A change of one on either side would change the throne.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. The Democratic Caucus has passed a resolution saying I can not go skydiving anymore, but the Republican Caucus invites me every day.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. I am not sure just what the message is.

Mr. Chairman, I think half of Vermont is down here. Joe Busha, Connie Bellavance, Earlene Bosley, Carol Brill, Sue Steinhurst , and Cathy Sjolander, are here. They were in the office with me earlier.

You know, just the fact that we have only 20 or 30 inches of snow in Vermont does not slow them up from coming down. It may slow them up from getting back.

They are also fans of yours, Mr. Chairman, because they know how hard you have worked on these nutrition matters, just as our witnesses have. Marshall Matz, I see him here, and what a great job he has done, over all these years.

Senator McConnell is now Chair of the Nutrition Committee. My first choice was to become Ranking Member of that subcommittee. You and Senator Harkin were good enough to give me that choice. Senator Harkin, of course, has been a strong proponent.

You know, there are some things that we can do together, ASFSA and the committee. In my own State of Vermont, you did a great job using the breakfast program startup funding. There was a huge increase in the percentage of schools offering breakfast programs.

There are a couple of things that I would like to speak about. I am going to be working with a number of Senators on a bill to clarify USDA authority to totally eliminate the sales or the donation of soft drinks to children before the end of the last lunch period.

I really believe that selling soft drinks to school children just before or during lunch does not send the right message. It is really a very poor nutrition policy. I have talked with those who run the nutrition programs, not only in my own state, but elsewhere, and they agree.

I am perfectly willing to entrust this important decision to the Secretary of Agriculture. If we pass this, she will have to get public input, and we will have that.

Now the other item is the McGovern/Dole International School Lunch Program, that Senator Lugar has already talked about. I have worked with him and Senator Harkin and Senator Durbin and others on this. I have talked about it with both Senator Dole and Ambassador McGovern.

We had a very good meeting with former President Clinton. We had Senator Dole and Senator McGovern there, shortly before the end of President Clinton's term.

I do remember the great line of Senator Dole's. You know, if he had been elected President, that would be about his last couple weeks in office. He turned to President Clinton and he said, "I know exactly how you feel."

I looked at Senator Dole and Senator McGovern, two people that I respect greatly, both of whom I served with, and the message they sent was, this is not a partisan or political issue. This is an issue of good sense.

We have an opportunity to embark on a very good and historic venture, because of the unexpected and, I think, tremendous benefits that it could have for world peace and understanding.

You know, most beginnings rarely seem momentous at the time. Then you look back, and you study it, and you realize how important it is. What a bold vision it is for a multi- national effort to provide meals to very needy children in school settings.

Think of the changes in societies, in countries, if these children had the nutrition, what it would do for their health care, what it would do for their education, of both boys and girls, especially in parts of the world where only boys get educated and girls do not. Think how important it would be.

This is a very, very good thing. We have seen it in Ghana, where the Catholic Relief Service Project has seen the number of girls enrolled in school jump by 88 percent. Their attendance rose by 50 percent, because of the program.

Catherine Bertini, the Director of the World Food Program said that in Pakistan, they offered cooking oil to families, if they sent their children, and especially girls, to school. The parents' response was overwhelming, and enrollment of girls doubled.

I hope we can introduce what I call the McGovern/Dole Bill next week in the Senate, along with the House. These are important things.

Senator Lugar, in fact, probably does have the greatest understanding of foreign relations and the complexity of it, of any member of the U.S. Senate, and certainly any member that I have served with. He knows that this is not an easy thing.

It can be idealistic, but I think it can be done. If it is done, the wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth will speak to its moral core, and will do something that will benefit all the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Leahy. I thank you for that compliment.

I would just add to that, of course, the message that we want to give, as the most powerful nation, is a good message, in terms of nutrition, in terms of our experience and our educational opportunities, which other nations will perhaps want to share.

Now having heard all of this testimony by Senator Leahy and myself, Ms. Hurt, do you have a comment, or do other members of the panel? This would be if you want to reinforce points that you have made or have additional thoughts.

Ms. HURT. We appreciate your summary, Mr. Chair, and want you to know that we certainly will address the issue of a comprehensive nutrition education program.

We cannot do this by ourselves. We see that parents need to understand the importance of feeding their children the right foods. It appears to us that many of today's parents are quite confused about that and, in fact, may not be the role models that they need to be, too.

In addition, everyone in the school setting needs to step up to the plate and help us with getting a consistent message to our students.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Hurt, just on that point, technically, the school meals that you serve are nutritious.

Ms. HURT. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I suppose we need to define what standards we are going to use. For instance, if we go out to the parents, parents would say, well, I just read in this magazine an authoritative statement on nutrition which said this, and what do you have to say about that?

You know, we have now the USDA standards and goals and the pyramid. There are certain benchmarks that are still, I suppose, controversial. Nevertheless, they have been tested reasonably over time, in terms of the numbers of servings of fruits and vegetables, of cereal grains and various things that ought to be a part of a diet each day. Obviously, a complete daily diet cannot be encompassed

totally by the school lunch or breakfast or snack programs, but they can contribute and be consistent with daily guidelines.

I have often wondered, as we think about a more sophisticated educational approach, for children and their parents, which authorities we cite, and with what confidence we do so. How do we fill in the blanks concerning healthful food choices, so we are not accused of making arbitrary judgments or following fads of the moment when we are relying on researched-based work.

Have you given thought as to how you cite the authorities, or how your an understandable and credible message that to everybody, adults and children?

Ms. HURT. Well, it is something that we certainly need to address and look into. The food guide pyramid is a simple plan, easy to understand, and one that we use when we do nutrition education in the classroom.

It is our opinion that it needs to be addressed collectively by all of us, and a consistent message be sent to parents that is simple; and not only to parents, but to all Americans, that is simple and easily understood.

Obviously, we are not hitting the mark with it. Do we need to send more frequent messages? Yes. Do we need to put more dollars behind that? Yes. Does it need to be consistent throughout the schools? Certainly.

Ms. STILES. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I was pleased to hear you speak about physical education and sleep, because I have been a school Food Service Director for 26 years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to go into the classroom, and do some nutrition education.

I have a pyramid that I have, that has the balance on the top for the meals. My two angles at the bottom, one is the proper amount of exercise, and the other is the proper amount of sleep. I have been preaching your spiel for 20 years now.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, as an educator, you are probably not going to be able to control the sleep problem.

Ms. STILES. No, we cannot; we just advise.

The CHAIRMAN. At the same time, you can advise.

The exercise message is something else. Here is an area that many school systems have abandoned, and have said, essentially, this is a frill or a less essential. We are here to teach English and mathematics and solid academic subjects.

By the same token, nutrition might be thrown overboard, too, as almost akin to the physical education program. We are dealing with endangered species, in terms of the things that we feel are important here, to the basic health of Americans, which in turn is addressed in this body, through legislation costing hundreds of billions of dollars.

Now we all need health care under any circumstances, but the excessive frequency of many health problems that we face in this country can be attributed back to inadequate nutrition, exercise, and sleep.

If children in the educational process do not have any guidepost to start out on, heaven help us with regard to the overall objective. You are trying to say this, and that with modest sums of federal

money, health messages will need to be intergrated with other educational requirement and infrastructure.

These are decisions that school boards all over America will have to make as value judgments, and the judgments with regard to healthy children and healthy Americans, have not been running in our favor, in my opinion.

Your testimony today is very important. You, along with many others serve as a vanguard in school districts all over the country, who might be inluential at the local level, where probably it really counts.

You know, ultimately, at this level, we can send out nutrition and other health messages that we think are important, and even fortify them with some moneys, which will have to be matched, again and again, by various others.

Senator Leahy, do you have another comment?

Senator LEAHY. Mr. Chairman, I do not expect an exact answer to this.

For Ms. Hurt and the others, I wonder, do you have any sense of how much having sodas and soft drinks before lunch cuts into the consumption, either of the nutritious foods we have talked about, or things like fruit juice, milk, or whatever else that children might need?

Ms. HURT. Well, we certainly know that soda and soft drinks available, outside of the school cafeteria and, actually, in some cases, in the cafeteria during the school day. It is very appealing to our students.

We also know that the consumption of those products are pretty much empty calories, fills them up, leads to childhood obesity, and they may not come into the cafeteria for the National School Lunch Program, or the National School Breakfast Program, if they are in a hurry, and have already essentially been satisfied. You know, they feel full, and so they are moving on with the rest of their school day.

I do not have any statistics or data for you on exactly how much our students are drinking, before they come into the school cafeteria.

Ms. MACDONALD. If I might add, Senator Leahy and Chairman Lugar, this is an extremely complex issue, as I know you understand. There are school administrators who, in attempt to keep students on campus, are looking at providing scenarios where students will stay on the campus, and not leave to find those foods that they want which may not be of the highest nutritional content.

We are in a very difficult position, in evaluating where we fit into this scheme of things. That is why we mentioned the collaborative approach between parents, between school administrators, and school principals.

Certainly, the Department of Education would play a big role in helping those agencies understand that we need to look at what is good for students, through the eyes of all of the players, and come to a consensus, so that we can have healthy children, who have access to nutritious foods with a nutrient- dense basis.

Ms. HURT. I also think that we need to continue to promote that the National School Lunch and National School Breakfast as an integral part of education; not just a place where kids come to fill up

their bellies. Certainly, it is a program that helps alleviate hunger; but it is a part of education.

Senator LEAHY. Every teacher tells me the same thing. Among the reasons for the school breakfasts is that children in some areas leave home so early that they do not get breakfast, or they are in circumstances where their families can not afford to provide a healthy breakfast.

Ms. HURT. Yes.

Senator LEAHY. If the kids are nutritiously fed, not with empty calories, they learn better. You do not really need to be a scientist to know that.

Every parent knows that. You can see it in your own children, when their attention span drops out. For those less fortunate to be parenting grandchildren with them, all over again. If children are adequately fed, they are fine; if they are not, problems they arise.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask if any of the panel have any further comments?

Ms. HURT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We appreciate your giving us the time and for your support. Thank you, Senator Leahy, for the support you have also given us over the years. It has been truly important.

The CHAIRMAN. We thank you for your leadership. We will do our best to examine, not only your testimony, but likewise the extended remarks that you and your association, really, have made throughout the year.

Ms. HURT. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Today's hearing is basically an annual rally of the faithful.

Ms. HURT. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Life goes on, and we have to use the day-by- day opportunities to be helpful.

One of the dilemmas is that to the extent that we have Federal legislation that mandating school policy, we run into an age old problem of the autonomy of the local school board and the State Department of Instruction.

We may say, well, listen, we are talking about the health of children, and we are. This is very serious. State and local boards would say, well, so are we. We, as a matter of fact, at the local level and at the state level, are just as strongly idealistic as you are about it. We resent your sending down messages that say, you must do this and you must do that, and so forth.

I suppose that was the basis for our crisis of five years ago, in a way. There were many people who saw an opportunity to break up Federal mandates and system, operating more on an ad hoc basis, state by state or board by board. This a very important problem.

In another forum, people are discussing student testing should children reach a certain reading level at the end of the third grade or the fourth or the fifth or so forth. This is a big debate, and it may very well be that the Federal government will decide what we are going to do.

People are very carefully saying, but the states will determine the tests. It will not be a national test. States will have to deter-

mine how the children are doing, but they must reach a certain level of performance. It is a delicate matter, which I think you recognize.

We need your guidance how to work through this situation, so that we are as effective as possible, in the substance of nutrition policy, without running aground with people who are resentful, that we have reached too far.

The problem that Senator Harkin mentioned, is a serious one. You cited the Washington Post story, which illustrates that many times school administrators, principals of your schools, decide that generating school income from low-nutrient food sales is more important. There are crushing financial burdens upon our schools, at least as they are perceived, in terms of the total needs of students, as they perceive them.

They would say to the Senators who are here today, back off; we know the needs of our school, our children, better than you do. Well, who are we to argue on that?

On the other hand, we are arguing, in a way, that something is occurring here. As you are suggesting, Ms. Hurt, there may be an alternative cafeteria system going on, informal as it may be, outside the cafeteria, that the school lunch program becomes almost an academic exercise whereas, real life goes on, somewhere else.

Nutrition messages are delivered in different contexts throughout a school and with strong sponsorship, by many persons. That is a very difficult thing for American education to sort out, quite apart from this committee, as advocates of school lunches.

Nevertheless, having seen the dilemma, we must try and think our way though. How do we make a difference in addressing this serious problem.

Many of you in your testimony have underlined this point, and many letters have come to the committee, I suspect from those in the room today, indicating the dolemma faced in schools.

Well, we thank you again for coming. We thank all who have participated in the hearing. The hearing is adjourned.

Ms. HURT. Thank you.

Ms. MACDONALD. Thank you.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 10:25 a.m., the committee was adjourned, to reconvene at the call of the Chair.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 6, 2001

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RICHARD G. LUGAR
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION
AND FORESTRY
March 6, 2001

Good morning. Today our committee will hear testimony on the federal child nutrition programs and recommendations for improvements. These programs the among the Committee's highest priorities. Adequate and appropriate nutrition, among children, seniors and all Americans, is a matter of public health. It is especially important among children – in their early physical development, performance in school and in their preparation for adulthood. The school lunch, school breakfast, special milk, after-school snack, summer food service, and child and adult-care feeding programs are all vital components of our national efforts to encourage healthy eating habits that will hopefully guide food choices throughout life.

March is National Nutrition Month, which is an annual nutrition education and information campaign designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. It is a distinct pleasure to hold this hearing to receive testimony one of the vanguards among child nutrition organizations – the American School Food Service Association. The committee is pleased to be able to hold this hearing to coincide with your presence in Washington. I note, Ms. Hurt, that your testimony lists the Hoosiers present today. I am happy to see so many representatives from Indiana. Welcome home-state friends, and all the members of the association.

We need to be concerned about children's eating habits. Often they make poor food choices. Many do not exercise nearly enough. As a result, many of our children are heavier than ever before. These behaviors set lifetime patterns that – unless corrected – put them at risk for heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and stroke, just to name a few diseases.

The federal child nutrition programs provide an opportunity to help guide food choices for school-aged children. These programs, coupled with nutrition education, and other efforts can help address the nutritional needs of our young people.

The efforts of your association, and others who administer such programs, are appreciated as we work toward helping Americans live healthier lives. We are pleased to hear your suggestions on ways to improve the federal child nutrition programs.

We also look forward to your comments regarding the proposed international school lunch program. On July 27 of last year, I chaired a hearing to receive testimony

from Ambassador George McGovern and Senator Bob Dole on the proposed international school lunch feeding program. Senators Leahy, Harkin, Durbin, Cochran and I are interested in moving ahead with legislation on this issue. Agriculture Committee staff have been working with other Senate offices to design such a program.

Last year President Clinton announced the Global Food for Education Initiative, a $ 300 million pilot program based on the McGovern-Dole initiative. Senator Harkin, Senator Durbin and I have asked the General Accounting Office to review aspects of this initiative which will be helpful in our own legislative initiative.

I now turn to Senator Harkin for his opening remarks.

* * * * *



http://www.senate.gov/~harkin/

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 6, 2001

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR TOM HARKIN (D-IA)
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HEARING ON SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

"Thank you Mr. Chairman. This Committee has a long tradition of solid bipartisan support for school meals and child nutrition. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these very important programs, as well as with the chair and ranking Democratic member of the nutrition subcommittee, Senator McConnell and Senator Leahy.

"Many groups and many people come to Washington to make their case to Congress. I cannot think of any group that comes here with more joy, enthusiasm and commitment than the members of the American School Food Service Association. Their work providing sound nutrition is critical to the future of our children and our nation, and they do it with real dedication. Our job is to provide the resources and support they need to succeed.

"So I very much appreciate the testimony today from Marilyn Hurt, the president of the ASFSA and the attendance of the Iowa School Food Service Association delegation: Carolyn Klein, President, and her husband Perry; Marilyn Wilkins, President-Elect; Diane Duncan-Goldsmith, Vice President; Teresa Nece, Legislative Chair; and Elizabeth Hanna, Regional Director for the ASFSA; also, Patty Harding, Jon Larson and Del Johnson.

"I especially want to mention my interest in promoting stronger school breakfast programs. For learning and good nutrition, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. We now have full funding for the demonstration project to test the benefits of providing no-cost breakfasts in grade school. And we must do more get breakfasts out to kids who need them but do not now get them.

"Local school food service operations and USDA have made great strides in improving the nutritional quality of school meals. It is a real shame that this progress is being undermined daily by the marketing to our children of competing foods of little or no nutritional value. Currently, USDA has only weak rules to prevent sales of soda pop and candy from interfering with school meals. Now we learn schools are ignoring even these weak rules. It is not right that taxpayer dollars go out to support sound nutrition, only to have that sound nutrition undercut right in the schools themselves. It is very important that our Committee address this problem.

"Finally, I want to express my strong support for the Global Food for Education Initiative which was proposed by former Senators McGovern and Dole and begun by President Clinton. By helping to provide food in connection with education we can support both learning and better nutrition. I hope very much to be able to work with Chairman Lugar, Senator Leahy and others to extend and strengthen this very promising initiative.

"Thank you Mr. Chairman."

Testimony

of the

American School Food Service Association

before the

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

United States Senate

March 6, 2001

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Marilyn Hurt, the President of the American School Food Service Association, and the Director of School Nutrition Programs in La Crosse, Wisconsin. With me today is Marcia Smith, the ASFSA President-Elect; Vice President Gaye Lynn MacDonald; Nancy Stiles, Chair of our Public Policy and Legislative Committee; and a few hundred of my closest friends, including several people from your home state of Indiana that we'd like to recognize by name: Bonnie Cooprider from Mill Creek Community Schools is President of the Indiana School Food Service Association; Gail Knafel, President-elect from Cromwell, Indiana; Mike Miller, state legislative chair and general manager of SFSPac in Indiana, a company that provides sanitation and safety programs for school food service industry and an industry partner; and Barry Reese from DeKalb County and member of our Public Policy and Legislative Committee.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to express our deep appreciation to you and the Committee for again holding this hearing to coincide with our annual Legislative Action Conference. Clearly, it is a very special courtesy and tradition, and it says a great deal about your commitment to this issue. On behalf of the entire Association, and the children we serve, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, our long-term goal, as you know, is to provide all children with nutritionally adequate meals, at no charge to the child at the point of service. We believe the responsibility for such a program should be shared among federal, state, and local authorities, along with the parents, and we remain open on how to achieve this objective. We feel there are significant advantages to such an approach, and we look forward to working with this Committee, the Congress and Secretary Veneman to explore all options.

The current federal commitment to school meal programs is over $6.5 billion per year. This shows a tremendous amount of support from Congress for these important efforts, and I'd like to thank all of the members of this committee for their commitment to providing nutritious meals to America's schoolchildren. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to share with the Committee several issues regarding the administration of school feeding programs in the United States and around the world.

Nutrition Education

Mr. Chairman, as we all know, children in America are suffering from distressing rates of obesity and undernutrition. Failure to confront this issue now could result in serious consequences down the road. In addition to the acute public health problems caused by epidemic obesity, the economic costs – both in increased medical expenditures and lost work productivity – could be immense.

Further, nutrition is a risk factor in heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes. Symptoms of these diseases are appearing earlier in life, and we are seeing children with diseases normally associated with adults.

At the request of Congress, USDA recently issued a report in which it recommended the creation of an national nutrition education program. In addition to increased federal efforts, it recommended grants to states and local school boards to create and administer a comprehensive nutrition curriculum in schools.

Despite the size of the federal commitment to child nutrition, the government currently invests virtually nothing in teaching our children the importance of consuming healthy nutritious foods. ASFSA is a strong supporter of nutrition education, and encourages Congress to consider legislation that would create an integrated national nutrition education program for America's school children and young adults. Our thought is that it might be reasonable to start with an authorization of $50 million per year, approximately one dollar for each child in school.

Food Sold in Competition to USDA School Meal Programs

Every day in this country, schools offer a variety of foods for sale that compete directly with federal school meal programs. As was pointed out by the Washington Post last week (Schools Hooked on Junk Food, February 27, 2001) "[T]he students may be junk food junkies, but the schools are hooked, too, increasingly dependent on the revenue that soda and candy machines bring in each year." This is a huge challenge for school food service. On the one hand, our highest priority is to provide high-quality nutritious meals. On the other hand, there is great financial pressure from school district administration to be self-supporting and even in many cases to be a revenue source for the district's general fund. Compounding this pressure, the cafeteria frequently finds itself competing with principals, coaches, and others trying to raise money from food sales to students.

In the 70's Congress attempted to address this issue by giving the Secretary the authority to regulate the sale of competitive foods. However, in 1983 an appeals court ruled that the Secretary's authority extended only to the time and place where school meals are sold and served*. ASFSA believes that the Secretary should have the discretion to regulate the sale of competitive foods at any

* National Soft Drink Association vs. Block, 721F.2d 1348 (1983)

time during the school day and throughout the entire school facility and encourages the Congress to enact legislation to accomplish this.

USDA recently issued a report to Congress, which we would like to make part of the hearing record. The report describes the impact of competitive foods on the federal school lunch program. It pointed out several issues that arise when competitive foods are readily available to schoolchildren during the school day.

- Competitive foods create diet-related health risks. School meals are more nutritious than ever before, and studies indicate that children who participate in school meal programs receive more essential nutrients than children who do not. Competitive foods are often high in fat, added sugars, and calories, with low nutrient densities, and consumption of such foods has been shown to lead to obesity and other health problems.

- Competitive foods adversely affect student participation in federal school meal programs. Because these foods can be offered almost anywhere on campus, and throughout virtually the entire school day, many students consume them in lieu of meals offered through school food programs. This declining participation undermines the school food programs because it results in decreased cash and commodity support from USDA for school meals.

- Competitive foods may stigmatize students who participate in school meal programs. Because competitive foods are available only to those who have the money to purchase them, students may perceive that their school meal program is intended for lower-income children. ASFSA feels that school food programs should be portrayed as reliable and nutritious food sources for all school children, and be recognized for their contribution to the educational mission of a school.

- Competitive foods convey a mixed message. Children are taught in the classroom about the importance of a healthy diet, but are surrounded by vending machines and snack bars offering an array of low-nutrition, high-sugar snack foods and drinks. This sends the message to children that nutrition is merely an academic exercise, unrelated to their health or well-being.

Based on these findings, USDA recommended in its January 12, 2001 report to the Congress that the Act be amended to "strengthen the statutory language to ensure that all foods sold or served anywhere in the school during the school day meet nutrition standards." ASFSA supports this recommendation. There should be a consistent policy on nutrition throughout the school. We should not teach one thing in the classroom, send one signal in the cafeteria, and a different signal just down the hall. Whatever regulation the Secretary establishes for competitive foods should apply throughout the school, for the entire day.

Bonus Commodities

In 1994, the National School Lunch Act was amended to ensure that schools receive at least 12% of their federal school lunch support in the form of USDA purchased commodities. In addition to this guaranteed minimum commitment, schools routinely receive "bonus" commodities that came

from agricultural surplus removal programs. Unfortunately the formula was changed in 1999 so that all commodities received, regardless of their budgetary source, counted toward the minimum percentage requirement. This change resulted in considerably fewer commodities being made available for school feeding programs.

Thanks to your leadership, Mr. Chairman, Congress addressed this problem, albeit temporarily, by restoring the original commodity assessment method for FY2000 and FY 2001. However, without Congressional action, the program will revert back to the pre-1999 rule on October 1st. If this is allowed to occur, it will have a negative impact on schools, by reducing their annual commodity allocation by $55 million; on agriculture, by reducing USDA's by approximately 85 million pounds of food a year, and on food banks, by diverting commodities to schools that could be provided to the food bank network. For these reasons, ASFSA supports permanently extending last year's statutory remedy so schools can continue to consider bonus commodities supplemental to entitlement commodities.

After School Snack Program

Because working parents are seeking alternatives to sending their children to an empty house at the end of the school day, after school programs are becoming increasingly popular and necessary. In 1998, recognizing the value of offering nutritious snacks as part of these after school activities, Congress expanded the availability of meal supplements to after school education and enrichment programs. The current maximum reimbursement rate for the snack program is only 55¢, which is considerably less than the actual cost of food, labor, and other expenses. Therefore, ASFSA supports legislation that would require USDA to determine the cost of providing snacks in after school programs and reimburse schools in an amount equal to the national average cost.

Additionally, ASFSA feels that states should be reimbursed for the expenses of oversight of the snack program, using the State Administrative Expense (SAE) formula. The legislation that expanded authority for after school snack programs did not adjust the SAE formula accordingly. This despite the fact that administrative expenses for other snack programs (i.e., the Child and Adult Care Food Program) are part of the formula. ASFSA urges Congress to correct this inconsistency, at a cost of approximately $600,000.

McGovern/Dole International School Lunch Program

There are 300 million hungry children in the world. An estimated 130 million of these children – mostly girls – do not attend school. To quote the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, George McGovern, "If education is the key to development in the Third World, the school lunch is the key to unlocking the education door." ASFSA agrees with this assessment, and applauds the last administration's contribution of roughly $300 million in agricultural commodities for the International School Lunch Program (ISLP) that was proposed by Ambassador McGovern and Senator Bob Dole. We look forward to working with the Bush Administration on this effort and are delighted that President Bush has asked Ambassador McGovern to continue in his post.

In addition to providing a humanitarian use for our surplus agricultural commodities, the International School Lunch Program draws children into the classroom where they can receive the obvious benefits of an education. The ISLP seeks to ensure that all children have at least one nutritious meal every day. Furthermore, it is designed to foster self-sufficiency within participating countries, so they eventually will be able to administrate and fund these school food programs themselves. ASFSA supports legislation that would permanently authorize and fund the McGovern/Dole International School Lunch Program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for accommodating ASFSA with this hearing. These are some of the important child food and nutrition issues facing the 107th Congress, and ASFSA looks forward to working with this Committee to address them. I hope the members of this Committee will find this testimony helpful as you grapple with the challenges facing the school food programs in this country and abroad, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have. Thank you.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 6, 2001

Schools Hooked on Junk Food

By David Nakamura
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, February 27, 2001

It's lunchtime at Montgomery Blair High School and junior Trevor Obarakpor, 16, is placing his order: a 20-ounce Pepsi, a honey bun and a Twix candy bar.

Sophomore Adrianne Schmidt, 15, lining up at the same row of vending machines, chooses a Dr Pepper, a bag of Cheetos and a pack of peanut M&M's.

The students may be junk food junkies, but the schools are hooked, too, increasingly dependent on the revenue that soda and candy machines bring in each year.

Through contracts with soft drink companies and other vendors, some schools are raising as much as $100,000 a year, money that pays for such things as computer rewiring, teacher training and Black History Month activities.

Read the fine print of those contracts, though, and the costs start to sink in: One school in Prince George's County guaranteed sales of 4,500 cases of soda a year -- or about 50 sodas a student. Some contracts state that schools could lose money if they turn off the machines at lunchtime, as required by state and federal law. Blair's machines were humming during a recent lunch hour, a common occurrence at schools across the region.

The biggest cost, some parents and health advocates say, is the health risk to students in a system that gives schools a financial interest in selling them more snacks. One recent study linked soft drinks to childhood obesity, and others point to tooth decay and caffeine dependence -- findings that the soda industry disputes.

"Things have gotten out of control," said Maryland state Sen. Paul G. Pinsky (D-Prince George's), who is sponsoring legislation that would require most soda and snack vending machines to be turned off during the school day. "Kids shouldn't be pawns. They eat a candy bar from a machine, get a brief sugar rush, and then their heads go down on their desks."

The U.S. Agriculture Department delivered a stinging report to Congress last month recommending that all snacks sold in schools meet the federal government's nutritional standards.

"One of the biggest challenges school meal program managers face is the competition with foods that are marketed to children through multimillion-dollar, glitzy and sophisticated advertising campaigns," the report stated.

Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.) and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) last fall commissioned a study that found that the uses and oversight of vending machines varied widely among school districts and even from school to school.

The explosion of vending machines in public schools is a relatively new phenomenon. As recently as a decade ago, such machines were uncommon on campus. But as principals and PTAs began to recognize the potential payoff of vending revenue during a time of increasingly tight school budgets, the number grew quickly.

High schools in the District receive $4,000 to $30,000 a year under a contract negotiated by the central office, while Fairfax schools take in $20,000 to $30,000 a year under a similar setup, officials said. The numbers are higher in Prince George's and Montgomery, where schools are allowed to negotiate contracts.

"This money is crucial," said William H. Ryan, principal at High Point High School in Prince George's,

which allows school-by-school contracts. Last year, High Point took in more than $98,000 in vending revenue, about a quarter of the school-based operating budget. "There are things that I do with that money around the school for students that I could not do," Ryan said.

He's not alone. President Bush's new education secretary, Roderick R. Paige, helped land a $5 million contract with Coca-Cola last year when he ran Houston's school system. Increasingly, school districts are signing exclusive deals with one soda company or vendor. Charles County, for instance, signed a 10-year, $1.75 million deal last year to sell only Coke products in its schools.

Some communities, though, have fought against the proliferation of snack machines in schools. In Philadelphia last year, parent activists successfully blocked a proposed 10-year, $43 million deal between the school system and Coca-Cola. Last week, the New York Board of Education settled a 1999 class-action lawsuit brought by parents. An agreement was reached that schools can sell only nutritious snacks during lunch hour.

Locally, though, vending machines have a firm footing in most of the region's school districts.

Montgomery Blair alone has about 30 machines that are scattered around the halls and outdoor pavilions. "I came out of Virginia and I was used to doing it, and folks here weren't," said Blair Principal Phillip Gainous, who has been at the school for 18 years. "I would tell them how to negotiate a contract. I said: 'Here's how I do it. Coke and Pepsi are the two players in town. They both want in. Pit one against the another.' "

In the mid-1990s, Gainous did just that and got Pepsi to bite on what he said was the largest high school vending contract in the nation.

In the 10-year deal, Pepsi agreed to pay Montgomery Blair a one-time $100,000 fee in March 1998, along with a minimum $55,000 annual commission, $1,450 annually in promotional materials for the school, five athletic scoreboards and other athletic supplies.

In exchange, Blair promised to place a minimum of 18 soft drink machines throughout the school and ensure that the student population remained above 2,100. The machines are on all day, despite a federal law prohibiting schools from selling such products during lunch hours and a Maryland law prohibiting schools from turning on vending machines until after the final lunch period.

Small wonder. The contract contains a clause that reads: "[I]f the Board of Education actively enforces the policy in which vending machines are turned off during the school day, the commission guarantee will be suspended."

This is not unusual: High Point's contract with Monumental Vending, which provides snack machines, has the same stipulation. High Point also guarantees that it will sell 4,500 cases a year, and easily sells more than that. Ryan said teachers and parents also use the machines, which are left on at night and on weekends.

Montgomery and Prince George's officials say they are auditing schools to see how much money they raise and whether they are abiding by the rules. Ellen Valentino, a spokesman for the Maryland soft drink association, said companies do not encourage schools to violate laws.

To many parents, the vending machine contracts are a necessary evil.

"Kids will eat chocolate and look for caffeine. It goes with the territory, like the hormones," Blair PTSA President Sallie Sternbach said. "From my perspective, I'd much rather have them be available on campus than put kids at risk finding a way to get off campus and cross eight lanes of traffic to find their manna."

That doesn't sit well with some students, including seniors Claire Sandberg-Bernard, 17, and Benjamin Tabor, 17, who have lobbied Gainous to get rid of the machines.

"The school system is failing our children in promoting unhealthy eating habits," Sandberg-Bernard said. "I am fundamentally opposed to the principles on which our school accepted the deal with Pepsi."

Tabor's father, Mike, is a farmer of fruit and vegetables. The Tabors have spoken about the dangers of non-nutritious eating, but say they are alarmed at the lack of response.

"It's not just that there are vending machines, but they're filled with the worst food there can be: candy and fried pork rinds," Mike Tabor said. "I thought, 'What's going on here? Why not have granola bars?' "

Gainous, though, says that years ago he tried an experiment. He filled one machine with more healthy drinks, such as V-8 juice. Virtually no one bought the product, he said. Although Gainous and others point out that Pepsi offers bottled water and juices in its machines, the juice offerings are made with only 1 percent to 5 percent real fruit juice.

Some principals have tried to restrict what they consider the worst of the junk food. Janice Mills, principal at Laurel High in Prince George's, has banned Pepsi from selling its highest-calorie beverage, Mountain Dew. She also has outlawed candy bars and licorice, though she allows granola snacks, chips and pretzels. Laurel's $42,269 in vending profits last year ranked 11th among the county's 20 high schools.

Fairfax's answer is to let a nutritionist oversee the contracts to ensure that the machines are stocked with foods that meet federal nutrition standards.

"I would never sacrifice nutrition for the bottom line," said Penny McConnell, Fairfax's director of food and nutrition services. "We're a federal nutrition program. Students get enough of this off campus, and they do have it available after school."

For Montgomery Blair senior Katie Riley, such considerations are unimportant. Pressed for time to study for a calculus exam, she stopped by the machines one recent day for a Pepsi and a bag of chips -- skipping the lunch her mother packed: yogurt, cookies and an apple.

"It's fast and it's filling," she said with a smile. Although she sometimes worries that such a meal could make her fat, she shrugged: "Part of you thinks about going more healthy, but most kids just go more for what tastes good."

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Easy Cash Eroding Their Principles

By Marc Fisher
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, February 27, 2001

For Montgomery Blair High School to reap the fruits of its $670,000 contract with Pepsi, the school must continue to defy state law by leaving its 30 vending machines on all day long.

It's right there in the contract between Blair and Pepsi: If the state were to act so dastardly as to enforce its rule requiring the machines to be switched off for most of the school day, Pepsi would pull the plug on the 10-year deal. Blair would have to get by on tax dollars.

Pepsi and Coke happily hawk such contracts, tempting principals with free scoreboards and other goodies, while the drink companies get exclusive control over what goes down the gullets of young people. You wouldn't expect anything else from companies that know no restraint in their zeal to capture impressionable teens.

But Phillip Gainous, Blair's principal, also signed that contract, and many principals in our area have signed similar ones. To grab a few extra shekels for his school, he committed to hedging the law and luring students into buying more fattening swill.

"From a philosophical standpoint, most principals wouldn't want this," Gainous says of the soda contracts. "But from a pragmatic viewpoint, there isn't any option. The bottom line is money." As for violating state rules, he says: "My understanding was that that rule had been relaxed. If machines weren't allowed to be on until after school, they might as well not be here."

It's not often that politicians get to stake out higher moral ground than the people who teach our children, but the Maryland legislature has just that opportunity right now. At a hearing in Annapolis, I watched as a sad parade of principals begged lawmakers not to squelch their flow of caramel-colored gold.

Parents "would thank you for continuing this funding stream," said Robert Kemmery, principal of Eastern Technical High in Baltimore. "They don't want to purchase more wrapping paper, candy, pizza, citrus fruit and other products to support school activities that they value."

So they'd rather have their children eat more Cheetos and drink more Coke to pay for activities tax money should support?

A stunned Sen. Brian E. Frosh (D-Montgomery) finally had to ask: "Is there anything you would not sell in your school?"

This insidious commercialization of schools has spread well beyond a simple soda machine in the hallway. Some schools install 40 machines. In Georgia, a student was sent home for wearing a Pepsi T-shirt to his Coke-contracted school. Stealing a gimmick from Hollywood, textbook publishers sell product placements. A math problem in a McGraw-Hill book begins, "What is your favorite color of M&M's?"

The creepiest venture of all, Channel One, is a TV "news" program that forces children in 12,000 schools -- including 90 in Maryland and 40 in the District -- to watch a daily 12-minute show including two minutes of candy and acne-cream ads. For delivering this captive audience, schools get "free" video equipment.

"In a perfect world," schools would get proper funding, said Alan Rifkin, one of Maryland's fanciest lobbyists, arguing for Channel One. "We don't live in that world."

This is why legislators must now protect children from their own principals.

"We have principals getting calls near the end of the month from Coke and Pepsi offering $10,000 bonuses if your kids drink 24 more cases," said Sen. Paul G. Pinsky (D-Prince George's), who proposes not to ban such deals but to shine the light of public awareness on them. He would require school boards to hold hearings before signing with Channel One and to let students opt out of the forced viewings. He would also tighten limits on when vending machines may operate and ban the purchase of school bus exteriors for rolling ads. "Even Virginia has that in their state law," he noted.

For easy cash, principals just adjust their moral compass. "Trust students to make good decisions" about what they eat, Kemmery said.

Frosh was puzzled: If kids are such sophisticated consumers, why grant exclusive contracts, preventing students from making choices?

Kemmery could only mumble something about needing the revenue. How sad.

E-mail: marcfisher@washpost.com.

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