Hunger; Series II; File 52

Juanita Hunter

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/jhunter-papers

Part of the Health Law and Policy Commons, History Commons, and the Nursing Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Organizations and Individual Collections at Digital Commons at Buffalo State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Juanita Hunter, RN & NYSNA Papers [1973-1990] by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Buffalo State. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@buffalostate.edu.
Doctors Say Hunger Is Epidemic in U.S.

BOSTON, Feb. 26 (AP) — Hunger has reached epidemic proportions nationwide, leaving up to 35 million people in a state of serious deprivation to illness and fear because of economics and "consequences of recession, a group of doctors and public health experts said today.

The report by the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America follows a year-long investigation by an 11-member group who traveled back roads, opened refrigerators and searched out what they called "the human face of hunger."

They found that, despite the economic recovery, "hunger is getting worse, not better." As evidence, they cited growing lines at soup kitchens and food pantries, a census in infant mortality and widespread testimony about malnutrition among the elderly, infants and children.

"Clearly, lack of food is not the cause of hunger in America," said the report, entitled "Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic." The group was headed by Larry Browne, head of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Recession and Program Cuts

According to the authors, hunger is a result of the lingering effects of the recession, combined with cutbacks by the Reagan Administration in income and nutrition programs that have left 35.3 million Americans with incomes below the official poverty line.

"Hunger is a problem of epidemic proportions throughout the nation," and the report released today said "While we now know the precise number of hungry Americans, available evidence indicates that up to 50 million citizens may be hungry at least a portion of time each month."

The authors did not arrive at their estimate of the hungry by counting them. They relied on statistics from the Census Bureau and the United States Department of Agriculture.

They reasoned that the 15.5 million Americans with incomes below the official poverty line who do not receive food stamps are unable to get an adequate diet at least part of every month. To that number they added sub-groups of America living near the poverty line who also do not receive food assistance, for a total of 16.6 million, which they rounded down to 20 million.

"Clear and Conscious Policies"

The latest Federal classification, for 1985, holds that a family of four is poor if its income is below $4,178. The poverty figure is based on each family's size in the previous year, so the 1984 figure will come out this summer.

The study defines hungry people-as those who are chronically unable to purchase an adequate diet as well as those who periodically run out of food altogether.

"The recent and swift return of hunger to America can be traced in substantial measure to clear and conscious policies of the Federal Government," the study said.

The authors called on Congress to increase welfare and food stamp benefits and end eligibility requirements to restore free and low-price meal programs to the schools; to expand the nutrition programs for women, infants and children; and to offer more meals for the elderly.

In Washington Monday, Ann Franklin, an assistant White House press secretary, said the Administration had not received the report.

Inside the Refrigerator

With this report from a diverse collection of physicians, the physician group renewed previous pleas on hunger and added more data through "hundreds and hundreds" of interviews and field studies in eight states and four regions.

"We managed to work in Hollister, N.C., in the home of a young mother of four children whose husband had no job," the authors wrote. "When we asked if last month she had money left over from welfare, she related the story of an unemployed, disabled worker who had the unemployment check traced to a girl selling lottery tickets at a corner store.

These were among the report's findings:

According to Second Harvest, an organization of food banks, near a 300 percent increase in food purchased since 1980.

Citicis to per purge reports of 60% to 90% of food banks seeing a 300 percent increase in food purchased since 1980.

The rate also includes peaks as high as 95 percent in New York City.

The study also includes peaks as high as 95 percent in New York City.

The report also includes peaks as high as 95 percent in New York City.

The 22-member study group included prominent doctors and public health experts from across the country, among them Dr. Victor Eidel of New York University, professor of the American Public Health Association; Dr. John C. Maclean, of the American Medical Association; Dr. Robert B. Redfield, of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Dr. Julius D. Richardson, former Surgeon General of the United States.
Dear Colleague,

Thank you for joining us as a signatory to the letter on hunger in America. Enclosed are a list of the nearly 300 medical, health and religious professionals who endorsed this call for Congressional action to end hunger. We have enclosed multiple copies for those who sent in more than one name.

The letter was presented to leaders of both houses of Congress and of both parties on April 18th. A delegation representing some ten organizations traveled to Washington to make these presentations and to hold a press conference.

We believe that this was an important step in the effort to focus national attention on the deprivation of millions of Americans. Never before has a group so large or so illustrious addressed this issue. The letter was reproduced in the Congressional Record and reported by UPI. It will have an impact on debate in Congress over funding for nutrition programs.

We encourage you to continue to address this problem through contact with local officials and senators and representatives. Please contact us if there is any assistance we can provide.

Sincerely,

Victor W. Sidel, M.D.
President, American Public Health Association; Distinguished Professor of Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School

April 18, 1985

To Congressional Leaders:

We believe there is no excuse for hunger in America.

As religious leaders and members of the health and medical professions, we call upon you to respond immediately to the present problem.

Fifteen national studies have concluded that hunger is again a serious problem in the nation. Recently, a group of prominent physicians found that hunger is worsening because of the unevenness of the economic recovery. Increasing numbers of families are standing in church soup lines. The gap between poor Americans with access to food stamps and those without grows wider.

We worry particularly about evidence linking hunger to ill health. After 20 years of decline, the infant mortality rate is levelling off. Unusually high rates of growth failure and anemia are found among poor children. Chronic diseases worsened by inadequate nutrition are seen among the elderly poor.

The commitment of a nation to feed its people is perhaps the most fundamental measure of its values. We believe that government action to assure access to adequate nutrition for all is medically wise. We believe it is fiscally responsible. And we believe it is our obligation as a people.

Bipartisan Congressional leadership virtually eliminated hunger in the nation once before. Hunger has returned, and it can be eliminated again.

We ask that you take immediate steps to eradicate hunger in America.

Sincerely yours,

(Signatories Attached)
CONGRESSIONAL ACTION SOUGHT ON HUNGER EPIDEMIC

A nationally prominent group of physicians and heads of religious denominations will release a letter to political leaders calling for immediate Congressional action to address America’s growing hunger epidemic on Thursday, April 18, 1985 at 10:30am in Room H-128 of the US Capitol Building. The letter, unprecedented in the stature and diversity of its over 200 signatories, will be delivered to the Republican and Democratic leadership in the US House of Representatives and Senate.

Congressional debate on key nutrition programs such as WIC, school meals, and food stamps will take place within the week.

According to spokesperson, Dr. Victor Sidel, president of the American Public Health Association, "There is no excuse for hunger in America. The commitment of a nation to feed its people is a fundamental measure of its values."

Included among signatories are: Dr. Harry Jennison, Executive Director, American Academy of Pediatrics; Dr. Harvey Fineberg, Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, Harvard University; Dr. Julius B. Richmond, former US Surgeon General; Reverend Monsignor John Egan, Archdiocese of Chicago; Dr. J. Larry Brown, Chair, Physician Task Force on Hunger in America; Arthur Simon, Executive Director, Bread for the World; Dr. Victor Sidel, President, American Public Health Association; Dr. David Korn, Dean, Stanford University Medical School; Reverend Avery D. Post, President, United Church of Christ; Rabbi Benjamin Kreitman, Executive Vice President, United Synagogues of America; and others.

-30-

STATEMENT OF MEDICAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS ABOUT HUNGER IN AMERICA

News Conference Statement

Victor Sidel, M.D.
President
American Public Health Association

April 18, 1985
Washington, D.C.

This morning we delivered the following letter to Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, and other leaders of Congress. / LETTER/

This communication to Congress is perhaps unprecedented insofar as the stature and diversity of its 250 signatories. They include deans of major medical schools and schools of public health, heads of teaching hospitals and Members of the Institute of Medicine, as well as heads of Protestant, Jewish and Catholic denominations in the United States.

It is our shared belief that there is no excuse for hunger in America. The commitment of a nation to feed its people is a fundamental measure of its values.

We are doctors and religious leaders, but we also are citizens and taxpayers who understand concern over the federal deficit. There is absolutely no reason our leaders cannot address the deficit and eliminate hunger in this nation. Other industrial nations, with fewer resources than the United States, have eliminated hunger. So can we, and it is time that we do so.

As American citizens, our people have a right to be free from hunger. And we all have a right to leadership which does not ignore a crisis like hunger, but responds aggressively to eliminate it.