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Juanita Hunter

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Hunger

## Doctors Say Hunger Is Epidemic in U.S.

BOSTON, Feb. 26 (AP) — Hunger has reached epidemic proportions nationwide, leaving up to 20 million people vulnerable to illness and fear because of economics and "conscious" Government policy, 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 researchers 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, increases in infant mortality and widespread testimony about malnutrition among the elderly, infants and the unemployed.

"Clearly, lack of food is not the cause of hunger in America," said the report, entitled "Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic." The study group was headed by J. Larry Brown 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 Federal poverty line.

"Hunger is a problem of epidemic proportions across the nation," said the report released today. "While no one knows the precise number of hungry Americans, available evidence indicates that up to 20 million citizens may

be hungry at least some period 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 income below the official poverty line who do not receive food stamps are unable to get an adequate diet for at least part of every month. To that number they added subgroups of Americans living near the poverty line who also do not receive food assistance, for a total of 22.85 million, which they rounded down to 20 million.

### 'Clear and Conscious Policies'

The latest Federal classification, for 1983, holds that a family of four is poor if its income is below \$10,178. The poverty figure is issued each summer for the previous year, so the 1984 figure will come out this summer.

The physicians' study defines hungry people as those who are chronically unable to purchase an adequate diet as well as people 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 ease eligibility requirements; to restore free and low-price meal programs to the schools; to expand the nutrition program for women, infants

and children, and to offer more meals for the elderly.

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

### Inside the Refrigerator

With \$120,000 in grants from a dozen foundations, the physicians' group reviewed previous studies on hunger and added more data through "hundreds and hundreds" of interviews and field studies, conducted in eight states and four regions.

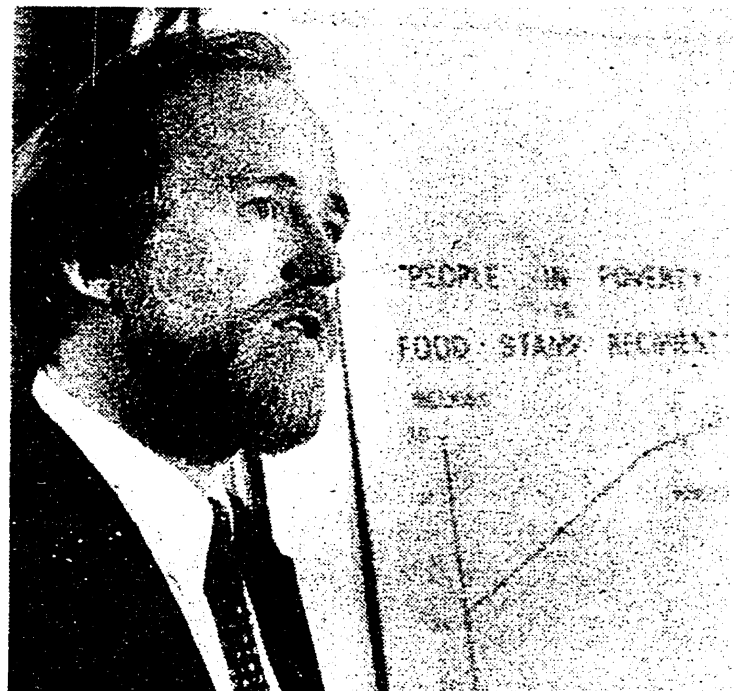
"We saw hunger in Hollister, N.C., in the home of a young mother of four children whose husband had lost his job," the authors wrote. "When we asked to look inside her refrigerator, we found the remains of an omelet, some Government commodity cheese and nothing else. There was no milk."

These were among the report's findings:

¶Second Harvest, an organization of food banks, notes a 700 percent increase in food distributed since 1980.

¶Clinics in poor areas report cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus, two "third world diseases of advanced malnutrition," as well as vitamin deficiencies, diabetes, lethargy, "stunting," "wasting" and other health problems traceable to inadequate food.

¶The United States infant mortality rate is worse than that of other industrial nations and appears to be leveling off instead of declining. Citing the "Annual Summary of Vital Statistics" in the journal Pediatrics, they quote an infant mortality rate of 10.9 per 1,000



Associated Press

J. Larry Brown, head of the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America, at news conference at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.

live births in 1983, which is "behind that of comparably wealthy nations." The rate also includes peaks as high as 25.6 per 1,000 in central Harlem in New York City.

¶From 1982 to 1985, \$12.2 billion was cut from Federal food stamps and child nutrition programs.

The 22-member study group includes

prominent doctors and public health experts from across the country, among them Dr. Victor Sidel of New York, president of the American Public Health Association; Dr. John C. MacQueen of Iowa, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Dr. Julius B. Richmond, former Surgeon General of the United States.

Hunger

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

677 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

May 13, 1985

Dear Colleague,

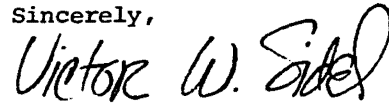
Thank you for joining us as a signatory to the letter on hunger in America. Enclosed are a list of the nearly 300 medical, health and religious professionals who endorsed this call for Congressional action to end hunger. We have enclosed multiple copies for those who sent in more than one name.

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.

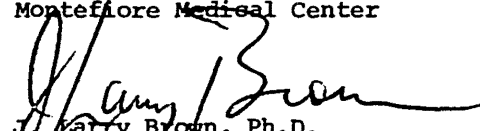
We believe that this was an important step in the effort to focus national attention on the deprivation of millions of Americans. Never before has a group so large or so illustrious addressed this issue. The letter was reproduced in the Congressional Record and reported by UPI. It will have an impact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



Harry Byown, Ph.D.  
Faculty of Public Health, Harvard University;  
Chairman, Physician Task Force on Hunger in  
America

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)

Hunger

H A R V A R D U N I V E R S I T Y  
S C H O O L O F P U B L I C H E A L T H

CONTACT: Judith dePontbriand 617/732-1265  
John Kellogg 617/732-1265

PRESS ADVISORY: April 12, 1985

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.

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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.