



Getting to the Root of the Problem GRASSROOTS

The Newsletter of the Hunger Action Network of New York State

January 2010

Faces of Hunger Action Network

Terri Scofield is a long time Hunger Action Network Board member from Suffolk County. Terri originally joined Hunger Action Network as a member of the Suffolk Welfare Warriors. More recently she has represented the Universal Living Wage Campaign. Terri has also been helping to promote our Hamilton Hill Food Processing products on Long Island.

“In the time immediately before I turned to welfare, I was reeling between low-end secondary labor market jobs. Most of the time I didn’t have health care for my son or me. When my son was small, I would deliver the paper in the early morning hours, go to my day job, then clean

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Child Nutrition Reauthorization

As part of the effort to end child hunger, anti-hunger groups are seeking at least an additional \$4 billion a year funding for the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition and WIC Act. This includes the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

While the act was up for reauthorization at the end of September, as a result of the health care debate Congress extended the program for one year, with a target of finishing reauthorization by March 2010.

Allocating an additional \$4 billion annually will be a challenge. To raise the needed funds, key NY targets are Cong. Charles Rangel, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and Sen. Chuck Schumer of the Senate Finance Committee. For proposals to improve the programs, key House Members on the Energy and Labor Committee are Cong.

Bishop (Nassau), Clarke (Queens), McCarthy (Nassau), and Tonko (Capital District). Cong. Tonko and Sen. Gillibrand have already introduced proposals to improve the school meals programs.

Three key priorities for reauthorization include: increasing access to and participation in the various programs; improving the nutritional quality of the food provided (e.g. strengthening nutritional standards); and, streamlining both the application for and administration of the programs.

The Food Research and Action Center, which is coordinating a nationwide coalition around reauthorization, cites key points such as:

- expand the afterschool meal program to all 50 states;
- improve the area eligibility test so more communities can operate afterschool, summer, and child care food programs;
- provide funds for a grant program to support the start-up and expansion of universal and in-classroom school breakfast programs;
- invest in summer nutrition programs by providing funding for start-up, outreach, and transportation grants; and,

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Notes from the ED

At our annual membership meeting, Hunger Action's members vote on issues they would like the organization to focus on during the coming year.

Three of the top four vote getters in this year's election were issues that have received support in the past: working on affordable housing issues for renters, promoting the soda tax to improve diets and to raise funding for community nutrition programs; and advocating for universal health care in New York State.

The top issue however was new: working more intensely in coalition to impact on issues such as good government, corporate power and legislative redistricting. Prof. Steve Breyman, one of the keynote speakers at the meeting, explained that we are unlikely to convince lawmakers to end poverty and hunger until we were able to reform the corrupt political culture of Albany where the size of campaign contributions usually trump all other concerns. The poor often lack money for food or rent, let alone being able to make a campaign contribution.

Earlier this month former Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno was convicted of two felonies. Bruno was charged with failing to disclose his money-making activities with various firms and clients and with concealing how his business ties might conflict with his public duties. More than a dozen state legislators have been convicted of various crimes in NYS in recent years. What was unusual about Senator Bruno was not that he shook down special interests to pay him money for access, but that he was so willing to publicly state that this is the way the system should work. In his mind - and that of many other legislators - it is ok to use one's elected position to enrich oneself and one's friends at taxpayer expense. It is how the(ir) world works.

In interviews with the Albany Times Union, jurors said they were shocked about how weak and ineffective the ethics rules were. While Bruno claimed to have clearance from ethics officials and legal advice to back up his private work, the jurors said it was clear that wasn't true. One juror said it "was absolutely pathetic. There's not disclosure there; it's concealment and deception." Others said the current ethics structure allows too much wiggle room for lawmakers to dodge disclosures of potential conflicts

The public needs to urge lawmakers to make ethics reform the first order of business when the Legislature returns in January. We need to create a system for independent oversight of legislative ethics (no one elected official appoints the majority), disclosure of business relationships between lawmakers and lobbyists (at least), tougher enforcement, and clear standards that forbid using one's public office for private interests.

We also need to restrict the size of campaign contributions, moving towards public campaign financing. Campaign contributions are too often merely legalized bribes.

We have to clean up politics in order to end hunger and poverty.
Mark Dunlea



Grassroots is published four times a year by the Hunger Action Network of New York State.

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Hunger, Food Stamps Rise

Hunger in America is at its highest level since 1995 when the United States Department of Agriculture began tracking food insecurity. An astonishing 49 million Americans did not have consistent access to food in 2008, an increase of 13 million from the previous year, according to the 2008 Household Food Security Report released in mid-November.

The total number of food insecure households rose from 11.1 percent (13 million households) in 2007 to 14.6 percent (17 million households) in 2008. One-third of these households faced very low food security, meaning they had to skip meals or cut back on their food intake due to financial difficulties, while the remaining two-thirds of food insecure households reported typically having food through a heavy reliance on food stamps and emergency food programs (EFPs) as well as eating a less varied diet. Very low food security accounts for half of the total increase; 6.7 million households experienced hunger in 2008 up from 4.7 million in 2007.

People of color were disproportionately affected. Black and Hispanic households experienced food insecurity at rates of 27 percent and 29 percent, respectively, as compared to 12 percent of white households.

Most unsettling about the latest USDA report is the increased number of hungry children. The number of households with children facing very low food insecurity skyrocketed from 323,000 in 2007 to 506,000 in 2008. Food access issues were much higher among households headed by single parents, with children living in these households facing food insecurity nearly 2.5 times the rate of children living with married couples (37 percent and 14 percent respectively). Overall, 22.6 percent of all

U.S. children faced uncertainty in getting enough to eat last year.

A recent study by Mark Rank at Washington University found that half of all U.S. children will receive assistance from food stamps at some point in their childhood; for African-American children, this figure is 90 percent. Currently, 36.5 million Americans receive food stamp benefits, an increase of nearly 40 percent from just two years ago, and half of the recipients are children. In some places, half of children are recipients.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps, helps to feed one in eight adults and one in four children nationwide—nearly 12 percent of Americans—yet only about two-thirds of those who are eligible apply for and receive benefits.

As of September 2009, 2,555,081 New Yorkers were receiving food stamp benefits, an increase of 477,307 from September of last year.

Counties across New York State have seen food stamp enrollment skyrocket since 2007. Numerous counties including Warren, Ulster, Delaware and Richmond have seen increases of over 50 percent while enrollment in Queens and Suffolk counties have increased nearly 60 percent. Even the more affluent suburban counties of Nassau and Westchester have seen increases of 44 percent and 33 percent, respectively, mirroring the enrollment increases of many rural upstate counties during the same period.

The USDA estimated that 11.3 percent of NYers were food insecure from 2006-2008. EFPs across the state have seen significant demand as well. The num-

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ber of food insecure New Yorkers has risen and continues to rise as the recession has worsened and unemployment in the state is now at its highest since 1983

Living Wage Jobs Now

As many Americans feel the pain from the worst economic recession in a generation, Hunger Action is increasing its advocacy efforts at the local, state and national level to create living wage jobs.

Hunger Action is supporting a multi-faceted approach:

1. raise the state minimum wage, making it a living wage rather than a poverty wage (see separate article);
2. raise both the maximum and minimum unemployment benefits;
3. maximize the drawn down of matching federal dollars for the various job initiatives for welfare participants and other low-income workers;
4. implement the recently enacted Green Jobs Green NY bill to weatherize / energy retrofit up to one million homes, making sure that a fair share of these jobs go to low-income individuals; and,
5. enact a federal and state jobs program to provide living wage jobs to all who need them.

In addition, the national AFL-CIO is calling on Congress and the Obama administration to take five steps now to care for the jobless and put America back to work.

1. Extend the lifeline for jobless workers. Unless Congress acts now, supplemental unemployment benefits, additional food assistance and expansion of COBRA health care benefits will expire at the end of the year. They must be extended for another 12 months to prevent working families from bankruptcy, home foreclosure and loss of health care. Extending benefits also will boost personal spending and create jobs throughout the economy.

2. Rebuild America's schools, roads and energy systems. America still has at least \$2.2 trillion in unmet infrastructure needs. We should put people to work to

fix our nation's broken-down school buildings and invest in transportation, green technology, energy efficiency and more.

3. Increase aid to state and local governments to maintain vital services. State and local governments and school districts have a \$178 billion budget shortfall this year—while the recession creates greater need for their services. States and communities must get help to maintain critical frontline services, prevent massive job cuts and avoid deep damage to education.

4. Put people to work doing work that needs to be done. If the private sector can't or won't provide the needed jobs, the government should step up to the plate, putting people who need jobs together with work that needs to be done. They must pay competitive wages and should target distressed communities.

5. Put TARP funds to work for Main Street. The bank bailout helped Wall Street, not Main Street. We should put some of the billions of dollars in leftover Troubled Asset Relief Program funds to work creating jobs by enabling community banks to lend money to small- and medium-size businesses. If small businesses can get credit, they will create jobs.

The Workers Alliance for a Just Economy, affiliated with the Center for Community Change, said that States should be required to prioritize funding for infrastructure projects that propose to allocate a significant portion of work hours to be performed by: Veterans; individuals who are homeless; individuals with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level; individuals who reside in census tracts where more than thirty percent (30%) of residents live in poverty; formerly incarcerated, adjudi-

cated non-violent offenders; and, Out-of-school youth.

In addition, WAJE wants to require that states allocate 1% of any federal infrastructure grant to support education and training programs, including apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

The National Jobs for All Coalition points out that during the Great Depression, Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt not only undertook unprecedented action to cope with the emergency, exclaiming that "We cannot be content, no matter how high the general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people ... is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure."

As a result of full employment during World War II, Roosevelt became convinced that it was desirable for the Federal government to permanently assure a job for everyone who wants one. FDR recognized that "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence" and, in 1944, called for an Economic Bill of Rights. The list began with the right to a "useful and remunerative job" and included, among others decent housing, adequate food, medical care and recreation. More than six decades later, these rights continue to elude us.

The State Legislature earlier this year included more than \$25 million in new funding for a variety of job programs for welfare participants, as well as passing the Green Jobs Green NY bill to create up to 14,000 jobs by energy retrofitting up to one million homes over the next five years. The funding for welfare jobs is eligible for a 4 to 1 match under the federal stimulus package, and an extra \$20

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NY Stimulus Alliance Fights Poverty

Amidst the gloomy news about New York's budget crisis and the nation's economic downturn, it is especially good to find cause for hope and opportunity. Hunger Action Network is connecting with a new alliance that promises good things for poor and hungry NYers, the **NY Stimulus Alliance**.

This unprecedented effort came about in response to an Open Society Institute RFP in July. Proposals for a \$500,000 two-year grant were solicited with the focus of maximizing the economic opportunity of minorities and disadvantaged persons connected with New York's use of federal ARRA or stimulus dollars. How and where are dollars being allocated? Who is participating in the decisions? And most importantly, who is getting the actual jobs created and preserved by this federal program?

Though competition for this grant was fierce, the NY Stimulus Alliance won the grant because of its very broad-based statewide grassroots base. It has also pledged to cooperate with any and all groups interested in these vital issues—and their ultimate goal is not just to keep tabs on a two-year program but to use these two years as a chance to make long-term enhancements in NYS'

workforce and community development priorities. Members include Common Cause NY, Gamaliel of NY, Community Voices Heard, Make the Road NY, the NY Immigration Coalition, and the National People's Action groups of NYS. These organizing groups also pulled together four research partners to help them follow the money and make policy recommendations for ongoing improvements to stimulus programs: they are The Center for Social Inclusion, The Opportunity Agenda, The Advancement Project, and the Kirwan Institute.

Their action plan involves four primary objectives:

1. **PUBLIC EDUCATION:** making sure the public can follow the allocations of funds and count the actual jobs created;
2. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** working closely with state and local government and holding public officials accountable for results that favor the poor and disadvantaged populations;
3. **COMMUNITY INPUT:** training ordinary citizens to frame their demands and work with elected officials and administrators to achieve the results they want; &
4. **LONG-TERM ALLIANCE:** building the long-term infrastructure for commu-

nity groups to work together for social change across New York State.

The first joint action of this alliance took place on October 31. It was a community workshop and press event that was held simultaneously in four cities across the state—Buffalo, Albany, Newburgh, and NYC—where the federal government's first job creation report was examined, and where community members were trained to understand how federal money reaches their community and how to use the Recovery.gov website to keep track of job opportunities and major expenditures in their locality.

In December, they met with Tim Gilchrist, NYS' stimulus czar, and the Governor's Recovery Cabinet. Hunger Action Network was represented, and it was the first of what will become regular quarterly meetings to discuss how stimulus funded programs can be monitored and improved along the way.

Members of Hunger Action Network who want to learn more about the NY Stimulus Alliance should contact Andreas Kriefall, Upstate Director, who is working closely with the alliance on job creation and government accountability.

Jobs ...from 4

million was pulled down for the transitional jobs program.

A dispute has erupted however between the State Senate and the Governor over whether a similar amount of money should be leveraged for the Green and health care welfare jobs initiative. While \$5 million of welfare funds was appropriated in the state budget for both programs, the Budget office treated it as only \$1 million in state spending with

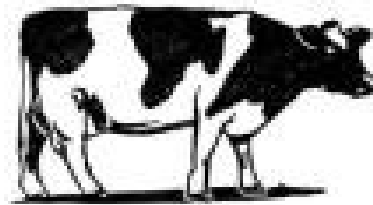
a \$4 million pull down, rather than \$5 million generating an extra \$20 million. Senators Squadron and Montgomery are pushing for the extra funds. One possible approach is that the state unexpectedly recently qualified for as much as \$100 million in extra welfare funds due to high food stamp caseloads. In addition, some of the funds from the Green Jobs Green Home bill could also be used for the federal match.

At the federal level, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is up for renewal. Al-

though overall funding in a renewed WIA is likely to stay the same, especially for formula programs. There will be more money for summer jobs and there could be an on-the-job wage subsidy of up to 50 percent of wages that would be provided through adult WIA programs and CBOs. Provisions for job training could change markedly. Given the emphasis that President Obama has placed on community colleges, they are likely to become the trainers of first priority.

Hunger Action Network

Green Space



Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) provides a fresh fruit or vegetable snack to all students in participating schools. The goal of this program is to increase the variety of fruits and vegetables children consume, create healthier school food environments, and positively impact the nutrition of not only the students but their families. Elementary schools with at least 50 percent of their students eligible for free and reduced-price meals can apply to participate in FFVP. Top priority is given to the schools with the highest proportion of free and reduced-price eligible students.

Congress originally created the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program through the 2002 Farm Bill as a time-limited pilot project in 25 schools in four states and in seven schools of the Zuni Indian Tribal Organization in New Mexico.

An evaluation report of the pilot program issued in May 2003 found that participating students consumed a larger variety of fresh fruits and vegetables than students who were not participating in the program, and began to positively influence their families' eating habits. Schools reported that students were eating more fruits and vegetables, had improved cognition, longer attention spans, were less hungry through the day, visited the nurse less, and had fewer behavior problems.

Efforts to expand FFVP nationwide and target it to low-income children were

successful in the 2008 Farm Bill. The program was revised to target elementary schools with at least 50 percent of their students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, with high priority given to the schools with the highest proportion of free and reduced-price eligible students. Also, FFVP was funded it at a much higher level – reaching \$150 million per year in 2011.

Elementary schools that serve a high number of low-income children (at least 50 percent free and reduced-price eligible) can apply to participate in the program. The number of schools varies in each state and is based on a per-student allocation that is at least \$50 and no more than \$75 per student per year. USDA guidelines recommend that the snacks be given as many times a week as possible over the entire school year.

Participating schools must:

- make free fresh fruits and vegetables available to all enrolled children;



- provide the fresh fruit and vegetable snack during the school day; and
- widely publicize within the school the availability of free fresh fruits and vegetables.

USDA recommends that schools also provide accompanying nutrition education, but funds provided for the program do not cover these costs.

Once a school is chosen, the entire student population must have the opportunity to participate at no cost.

Food Stamp Fingerprinting in NYC - Time to Go!

New York City is one of only four places in the country that requires food stamp applicants to be fingerprinted. Despite the state of New York lifting the requirement, the Bloomberg Administration has maintained that the practice is necessary to prevent fraud. States without the fingerprint requirement, however, have

lower fraud rates and higher legal participation rates in addition to significant administrative cost savings. Hunger Action has been calling for the lifting of the fingerprint requirement and recent reports indicate that the city may soon be forced to do so as the USDA is currently reviewing the policy.

Kitchen Grand Opening in Hamilton Hill

The Hamilton Hill Food Processing kitchen had its official opening on Wednesday Nov. 11. The kitchen is located in the Schenectady County Community Business Center at 920 Albany Street.

The kitchen was named in memory of the late Chauncey Williams, who had the initial vision for the project. Mr. Williams was the former President of the Hamilton Hill Neighborhood Association.

Hunger Action Network has developed a non-profit food packaging and processing business within Schenectady's Hamilton Hill neighborhood, branded Healthy Community Harvest. The goal of the project is to: 1) produce healthy and affordable food products; 2) provide employment and economic development

opportunities for low income residents; 3) Provide additional markets for local NY farmers; and 4) help promote better nutrition for local residents, especially children.

The creation of the Kitchen has been funded through grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Wright Family Foundation, Carlilian Foundation, and the federal CREES program. The Golub Foundation assisted with the design of the kitchen and donated some equipment.

The Food Processing project had been operating out of the SUNY Cobleskill Kitchen for its first year of operation but is now fully operational in Schenectady. More than two dozen stores presently carry the products,



which presently include bread spreads, sauces, and jams.

Hamilton Hill Food Processor will also become the first shared use/community kitchen in Schenectady County. The facility will provide technical assistance to local entrepreneurs and other nonprofits as well as allowing them access to the kitchen to develop and market various food products.

Ending Child Hunger by 2015

Pres. Obama has pledged to end childhood hunger in America by 2015 and USDA began holding regional listening sessions to get input on how to achieve this goal. Hunger Action attended the October 8th session in NYC. The full testimony is available at <http://hungeractionnys.org/testimony09.html>.

Drawing from proposals by Food Research Action Center and World Hunger Year, the following 8-point agenda is supported by Hunger Action:

Make Access to a Healthy Diet a Human Right. Strengthen the SNAP/Food Stamp Program by expanding eligibility, increasing benefits so that recipients can afford a minimally adequate diet, improving the way benefits are calculated and reducing red tape.

Strengthen Federal child nutrition programs so that more children participate

in programs like WIC, School and Summer Meals and receive sufficient, nutritious food. Enact stronger nutritional standards.

End Food Deserts: Make sure all families have convenient access to reasonably priced, healthy food. Food Deserts are geographic areas where there are no or very few places to purchase nutritious food. Support the development of grocery stores and food co-ops in low-income neighborhoods. Promote food buying clubs, farmers markets, community gardens, CSAs, backyard and rooftop gardens, and schoolyard gardens.

Raise the incomes of the lowest-income families. Increase refundable tax credits for families (child tax credit), and increase the minimum wage and other income supports (EITC).

Guarantee an Adequate Income for All Children. Most countries have a children's allowance. The TANF program should be overhauled to focus on ending childhood poverty and raising minimum benefits.

Create Living Wage Jobs. We need to create millions of high paying jobs in fields where poor people can compete, and make it easier to join a union.

Create a Peace Dividend. Make significant cuts to the military budget to provide funding for hunger, affordable housing, living wage job creation, and education. As President Eisenhower warned the country in 1953, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are not cold and are not clothed."

Make Health Care a Human Right

Dec. 10th was the 61st anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Demonstrations took place at Congressional offices in NYC and elsewhere, saying that Congress is falling far short of enacting a universal health care system.

Single Payer NY urged Senators Schumer and Gillibrand to vote for the amendments sponsored by Senator Sanders, Burris and Brown to substitute a single payer Medicare for All proposal for the present Senate Health Care bill. Failing that, the group wants Congress to pass legislation enabling states to enact their own single payer universal health care systems. The Canadian health care system, for instance, first started at the provincial level.

Article 25 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Senator Schumer has previously sponsored single payer legislation while in the State Assembly and the House of Representatives. Like President Obama, Senator Schumer has repeatedly acknowledged that a single payer system would be the best way to provide health care to all New Yorkers.

Human rights watchdog groups such as Amnesty International have come out in favor of single payer. “While the human right to health care does not mandate any particular type of health care system, of the reform proposals being discussed in the U.S. today, the single-payer plans are more universal, equitable

and accountable — the three key principles of the human right to health care. Single-payer plans approach health care as an essential service and a public good,” said Sameer Dossani of Amnesty International USA.

Single Payer New York previously urged NY’s congressional representatives to vote against the main Democratic Congressional health care proposals, saying that their main thrust was to provide a massive subsidy for private health insurance.

“The reason why the US spends such a massive amount of money to produce the worst performing health care system among the industrial countries is the central role of private, for-profit health insurance. Rather than solving this problem, Congress is intent on making the situation worse, increasing costs for consumers, taxpayers and employers while denying access to quality health care to tens of millions of people. Insurance companies are the real death panels,” said Dr. Richard Propp of the Capital District Alliance for Universal Health Care.

“Elected officials are the ones with the power to end this abusive, immoral health care system we have,” says George Randt, M.D., a member of the national single-payer advocacy group Healthcare-NOW!. “They have the power to take out the middleman—the private insurance industry—which provides no care but merely inflates the cost of care for everyone.”

The group said that the debate over establishing a public option had diverted public attention from the huge giveaways to the insurance company. “Even a robust public option would have left insurance companies playing a pivotal negative role in our health care system.

It was a flawed proposal. But Congress from the start made sure that there was no real threat to insurance company profits, turning the public option into little more than a dumping ground for the sickest Americans. Instead, average Americans will be saddled with paying for expensive health insurance that will still leave profit-seeking CEOs in charge of deciding who gets health care services and what providers you can see,” added Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network.

The current Congressional health insurance reform legislation resembles health reforms that have recently been tried and have failed numerous times at the state level.

Review of what works in this nation indicates that traditional Medicare is:

1. More efficient than private insurance (3% on administrative costs versus 15 to 20% with private insurance);
2. More accurate in processing claims than private insurance;
3. More popular than private insurance when those who have Medicare are polled; and,
4. More likely to pay for treatment that is ordered by a health care professional.

The recent state-funded study through the Governor’s Task Force on Universal Health Care concluded that a single payer system was the most cost-effective way to provide quality health care to all New Yorkers, saving an estimated \$20 billion annually in health care costs by 2019. Single Payer New York urges Governor Paterson, a long time single payer supporter in the Senate, to propose such a system in 2010. Single payer legislation has been sponsored by a majority of all State Assemblymembers and a majority of Democratic State Senators.

Getting Arrested for Single Payer Health Care

By Veda Myers

Wearing shirts with the message “VICTIM OF PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE,” we stood in front of Aetna Insurance on Park Avenue and chanted loudly, “Patients, not profits! Medicare for all!” Several days prior, I had agreed to risk arrest as part of a national campaign of peaceful civil disobedience to end insurance abuse and win true universal health care. The campaign is organized by Mobilization for Health Care for All.

Health care is one of the few issues that a majority of Americans agree on. Most people have some horror story they can tell you. Even those that have been lucky enough to get through life relatively healthy usually have a family member or friend that has gotten into debt, stayed sick, or spent countless hours arguing with the health insurance companies about why a necessary treatment should be covered.

My story is no different. Through my life I’ve been uninsured, underinsured, and insured by for-profit companies that see my fight for good health as an unnecessary cost.

On the morning of October 3rd, a single-payer advocate entered the offices of Aetna insurance in midtown Manhattan to demand that they approve all doctor requested life-saving treatment. When the demand was not met, 17 people, including myself, formed a human fence and blocked the entrance to the building. We then entered the lobby and sat on the floor in a circle, chanting and singing. We refused to leave until our demand was met.

Shortly thereafter, we were arrested for criminal trespassing, handcuffed, and

loaded into paddy wagons. We were unloaded at the third precinct in lower Manhattan where we spent the next 12 hours in small and crowded cells. The fingerprinting process took a lot longer than one would think, and by 11pm, we realized there was little hope of getting released that night.

After being given our first meal since early that morning, we were chained together, loaded on a paddy wagon, and sent to central booking to spend the night.

The experience taught me a great deal about law enforcement, such as the difference between police officers and correctional officers. The police officers were mostly friendly and seemed sympathetic to our cause while the correctional officers, who work in the jails, always spoke in the form of a yell. The message was, “you have broken the law and you are being punished.”

Asking for things like food, water, or toilet paper was met with anger. It was during this time that I learned that correctional officers make significantly less than regular police and generally have harder jobs that get less respect.

I felt some level of guilt knowing that the other folks in jail would have a much harder time than us protestors. Our group consisted of mostly white, economically privileged folks without criminal records and we knew we had a great lawyer from the Lawyers Guild representing us. Our appearances and situations were the opposite of most of our cellmates. It was a harsh reminder of the realities of the prison industrial system. Most of those arrested are poor people of color who commit nonviolent offenses and have little hope for a fair trial.



The mood in jail was somber. A woman was frantically calling family members to find someone to take care of her children. Another looked as though she had been there for days, but could not speak English and no attempt was being made to find a translator.

After a long night of cold hard concrete, florescent lights, and not-so-private bathrooms, we finally saw a judge and were given dates to come back to court.

Upon arriving home, I learned that my best friend from childhood was denied a necessary shoulder surgery by his health insurance company. Despite having the most expensive and comprehensive insurance available in the private market, he has no choice but to put off his surgery and endure constant and excruciating pain. The saddest part is that my friend’s story is not unique, rather, it is an all too common one.

Our health care system is fundamentally broken. There comes a time in the social justice movement that we must resort to civil disobedience to have our voices heard. I believe that now the time is right to grow and expand the movement. I hope others will join in the civil rights movement of our time.

To get involved, visit www.mobilizeforhealthcare.org.

Child Nutrition...from 1

allow child care centers and homes the option of serving a third meal.

In NY, Hunger Action coordinates the Faith and Hunger Network along with Bread for the World. Below is a summary of Bread's recommendations.

Improve Access:

Families cannot get access to benefits for their eligible children if there is no program in their community. Congress should increase the number of breakfast, summer, and afterschool sites and explore alternative models to connect hungry children with food during summer.

Explore alternative strategies to reach children without access to summer food sites, such as increasing children's SNAP (food stamp) benefits in the summer or providing WIC-style vouchers for the purchase of nutritious foods.

Provide outreach, technical assistance, and start-up funding to potential sponsors to help them establish breakfast, summer, and afterschool sites in underserved communities.

Expand the CACFP supper pilot nationwide so afterschool programs can provide supper to at-risk children.

Increase Participation.

Congress should simplify enrollment procedures and encourage school districts to find creative solutions to participation barriers. Expand cross-program direct certification to include Medicaid so children in that program are automatically connected with school meal programs. Encourage states to maximize the use of direct certification to more seamlessly enroll SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid children in school meals.

Provide universal free breakfast and eliminate the reduced-price fee in high-poverty school districts. Support the use of creative solutions – such as grab-and-go breakfasts, mobile SFSP, and satellite WIC clinics – to overcome transportation and other barriers to participation.

Provide transportation assistance to help children access out-of-school feeding programs like summer and afterschool.

Encourage Progress Toward Ending Child Hunger.

Pres. Obama set the ambitious goal of ending child hunger by 2015. With significant, targeted federal investments, this goal is achievable, but it requires a commitment from the states. Congress should encourage states and school districts to be active partners by setting tar-

gets, providing incentives, and rewarding progress.

Improve Benefit Adequacy.

While we must ensure that children have enough to eat, more expensive whole grains and fresh produce are essential to giving children a healthy start. Congress ought to provide children not just with enough food, but the right food:

Base nutrition standards for WIC food packages and school meals on scientific data from the Institute of Medicine and USDA's Dietary Guidelines. Reward schools that improve nutritional quality with higher reimbursement rates.

Our country has the resources to ensure an adequate diet for all our children. What we need is the political leadership in Congress to make it happen.

Farm to School

The 2004 Child Nutrition Act included one provision on Farm to School (section 122): a seed grant program with \$10 million in discretionary funding that failed to receive an appropriation. In this reauthorization, Farm to School advocates request that Congress support a Farm to School grant program with mandatory funding of \$50 million. This could fund 100-500 projects per year up to \$100,000 to cover start-up costs for Farm to School programs.

Farm to School enables every child to have access to nutritious food while also benefiting communities and local farmers. In addition to supplying nourishing, locally grown and produced food in schools, Farm to School programs offer nutrition and agriculture education through taste tests, school gardens, and farm tours. Local foods salad bars, harvest of the month nutrition activities, and garden based learning are a few ingredients.

All kids deserve healthy, high quality food. By sourcing locally, students can receive food that is fresher and often more tasty than food that has traveled a far distance. This exposure contributes toward developing a life-long taste for healthy and fresh foods.

Farmers are able to increase their markets by sourcing to schools, strengthening local economies and creating jobs.

Farm to School programs create opportunities for developing meaningful community relationships between schools, parents, and local farmers. They can also provide an important opportunity for experiential learning in nutrition, the environment, food preparation, and agriculture. Farm to school programs help strengthen schools' food service programs through training on product sourcing, food preparation, and menu planning.

Expand Universal School Breakfast

Congressman Paul Tonko (Capital District - NY) has introduced the Universal Classroom Breakfast Expansion Act to create a competitive grant program that will assist schools serving low-income children to establish a universal classroom breakfast program. Hunger Action supports the bill, though it wishes that it would be expanded to any school willing to participate.

“Every child deserves a healthy breakfast to start their day, but the current school breakfast program misses too many students,” said Congressman Tonko. “(I want to) help our schools ensure that every child has access to a good breakfast every day. Especially in these difficult economic times, for our municipalities, schools and families, it is important that we give our nation’s children the opportunity to succeed and enhance their mind, body and soul. Daily breakfast does just that.”

The Universal Classroom Breakfast Expansion Act creates a grant program that will help schools with start-up and

training costs associated with establishing a universal classroom breakfast program, including the purchase of equipment. The legislation ensures that the grant program is targeted, so it will reach the schools with the highest numbers of low-income children.

Universal classroom breakfast programs differ from the traditional school breakfast program by serving a free breakfast to all students in the classroom after the start of the school day. Breakfasts are brought from the kitchen into the classroom in containers that keep dishes hot or cold. This prevents children from missing breakfast because they cannot arrive at school early, and removes the stigma associated with the program, which normally has a majority of low-income students as participants.

Schools that have implemented universal breakfast programs report improved student achievement, attentiveness, and attendance. Those schools have also reported fewer visits to the nurse and a decrease in disciplinary referrals.



The legislation authorizes \$50 million for the program in 2011 and 2012. It sets up a competitive grant program through the US Department of Agriculture for states to apply and award sub-grants to schools. To be eligible, schools must have at least 40% of students eligible for free or reduced meals in the National School Lunch Program. Grant funds are capped at \$10,000 per school per year and the legislation would require schools that receive the grant money to provide the free breakfast for at least three years.

The USDA will be required to report back to Congress on the success of the program, including how the funds were used, participation rates, and impact on the educational environment.

PUSH Buffalo Rallies for Green Jobs

In early December in freezing weather, 70 protesters with PUSH Buffalo rallied in Lafayette Square to lower the heating bills of low-income residents. Buffalo has the fourth-highest heating bills in the nation.

PUSH used the Anti-Freeze rally to call upon National Fuel to weatherize 1,000 houses in 2010 over the next year in low-income neighborhoods. The idea is to create jobs for low-income residents while greening the city. PUSH sent a letter to National Fuel, asking for a meeting within 30 days.

“Houses and apartments occupied by low-income residents are often especially expensive to heat because they are not insulated and otherwise weatherized. In winter months, the heating bills can sometimes exceed rent or mortgage payments.,” said PUSH in its letter. PUSH says weatherizing typically costs about \$6,500 per unit and cuts heating bills by 30 to 40 percent.



The federally HEAP program gave \$50 million to National Fuel last year to help

cover the heating bills of low-income residents. PUSH says it makes economic sense to invest money in weatherization to reduce heating expenses.

PUSH sang their own utility-theme Christmas Carols such as “Heating Bells.” Participants carried signs such as “Turn up the Heat on National Fuel” and “We want to green our homes, not National Fuel’s wallet.” Singing was lead by St. Brokemas. The “National Fuel Bandit” did show up but fortunately PUSH was able to beat back the bill attack with a little people power.

Good Food, Good Jobs

by Joel Berg, NYC Coalition Against Hunger

More than 49 million Americans live in households that can't afford enough food. Locally, according to a new study by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, there was a 21% jump this year in people forced to use food pantries and soup kitchens. www.nyccah.org. Soaring unemployment and underemployment are exacerbating the problem.

Even worse, many New Yorkers also live in "food deserts" - neighborhoods in which, even if they could afford them, the healthiest foods are scarce or non-existent. These areas also tend to lack living-wage jobs.

For instance, in the 16th Congressional District in the South Bronx, the official unemployment rate was 13.9 percent, and 35 percent of able-bodied adults remained outside of the workforce. Bronx Community Board District One had a poverty rate of 45 percent - and did not contain a single supermarket of 2,500 square feet or more. Yet convenience stores, bodegas, and fast food restaurants were plentiful. It's no wonder that hunger and obesity are flip sides of the same malnutrition coin.

To tackle our interconnected food, nutrition, and poverty crises, the federal government should launch a "Good Food, Good Jobs" initiative.

Modeled after the "green jobs" concept, "Good Food, Good Jobs" would create jobs through projects and businesses that bring healthier food to low-income areas. Food and job deserts could become new oases of economic recovery and healthy living.

This effort should build upon the burgeoning community food security move-

ment, which is strengthening regional food connections with projects that are effective, but are currently too far small-scale to feed the masses. My home borough of Brooklyn is a hotbed of such activism, with numerous food-related businesses and projects - ranging from fish farm experiments in a basement of Brooklyn College to a company trying to entice landowners to allow others to garden on their land in exchange for a cut of the produce grown and cash collected.

Citywide in New York, the Speaker of the City Council, Christine Quinn, has just launched a visionary Food Works plan to help further build upon such efforts: http://council.nyc.gov/html/releases/foodworks_12_7_09.shtml

The federal initiative should begin by increasing funding for food systems projects of proven effectiveness, such as community and rooftop gardens, urban farms, food co-ops, farm stands, community supported agriculture (CSA) projects, and farmers' markets. Other important policies should include: expanding community kitchens that combine rescuing excess food with training people food-service jobs; helping new supermarkets locate in low-income areas and existing supermarkets thrive; and hiring unemployed youth to grow, market, and deliver nutritious foods, while teaching them entrepreneurship skills.

The initiative should also take bold new steps. It should provide wage and even commuting subsidies to help current U.S. residents find living-wage work at regional and local farms, reducing the impetus for growers to exploit immigrant farm laborers. Since there is far more profit in processing food than in growing it, the initiative should focus on supporting food businesses that add value year-round, such as neighborhood food processing plants; businesses that turn

produce into ready-to-eat salads and sandwiches; healthy vending-machine companies; and affordable and nutritious restaurants and caterers.

In contrast to making inconvenience a virtue in food preparation, this initiative should help working families by creating new types of ready-to-eat or easy-to-prepare foods that are nutritious, sustainable, and convenient. It should also support the construction and maintenance of community exercise and nutrition education centers, which would provide free or low-cost services to low-income community members. And given the growing concerns over the world's fisheries, it should also provide a significant investment into the research and development of environmentally sustainable urban fish-production facilities.

The Obama Administration should forge a partnership with state, local, and tribal governments, nonprofits, and the private sector to scale up such projects. Just as the federal recovery bill invested in the idea of "green jobs," a new "food jobs" agenda could spur not just economic stimulus but fight hunger, cut obesity, improve nutrition, and help reduce health costs.

The President, and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack have pledged to end U.S. child hunger by 2015 while also tackling obesity. Those objectives, combined with the need to jumpstart the still sluggish jobs market, make a "Good Food, Good Jobs" initiative a promising idea. It could create large numbers of living-wage jobs in self-sustaining businesses even as it addresses our food, health, and nutrition problems. But even in the worst case, it would create short-term subsidized jobs that would provide an economic stimulus, and at least give low-income consumers the choice to obtain more nutritious foods.

Faces ...from p. 1

banks and office buildings at night,” said Terri.

“The experience of applying for welfare was harrowing because growing up white, middle class, suburban, you think welfare participants are ‘the others’. So I was really surprised to see sixty people sitting in the waiting room, mostly white. I was encouraged when I found out about the college option under the federal JOBS program at the time. The things that held me up were lack of child care and transportation. I met dozens of other women who were exactly like me - let down by the police and courts, domestic violence victims (not yet survivors). We realized that we all had the same problems accessing support services and benefits,” Terri added.

“Over a 5 year period, I bounced between the secondary labor market and welfare 6 times. One of the most important things college did for me was restore my self-esteem because I was so used to being looked down upon by welfare case workers, landlords, supermarket checkout clerks. The two things that enabled me to get off welfare were a college education and childcare benefits. I started working for law firms but still not making any where near a living wage. I was pretty disenchanted by that and began working as coordinator of Suffolk Welfare Warriors, which allowed me to organize and meet other welfare recipients,” added Scofield.

Terri was active in working to improve welfare (TANF) when it came up for renewal five years ago. Unfortunately, many of the same issues remain.

“Two key things we have to do now for welfare reform: create affordable rental housing and enact a universal living wage. Unless and until we make

progress in these areas, we won’t see and end to hunger or poverty,” said Terri.

Terri is active in the Universal Living Wage Campaign. This year, 3.5 million people will experience homelessness. The federal government says 42% of them are working at some point during the week. These folks come from our 10.1 million minimum wage workers. The campaign seeks to fix the federal minimum wage and is based on the moral premise that anyone who works a 40 hour week ought to be able to access at least a studio apartment without spending more than 30% of income on housing.

The ULW formula is indexed to the local cost of housing using HUD Fair Market Rents and accepted government and banking industry standards of paying no more than 30% of income on housing. The plan proposes using the savings from TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Section 8, etc to subsidize the difference between the minimum wage and the ULW over a 10-year phase-in.

“Talk about an economic stimulus impact!” Scofield says. “Imagine the number of jobs created by the demand for rental housing and related goods and

services when more than 10 million workers earn paychecks that bring them to or above the federal poverty level.”

Scofield stated her work with and on behalf of Hunger Action Network satisfies on a number of levels. “Hunger Action Network’s mission, members and programs are cognizant of the distinction between charity and justice. We strive constantly to create the justice that will eventually eliminate the need for charity. The mix of activists and advocates at Hunger Action ensure that we address hunger and poverty issues in a holistic and realistic manner,” said Terri.

Terri added that “While we work hard to maintain funding for feeding programs and income transfer policies and programs, we are ever mindful that until we create economic justice and real opportunities for hungry people, we’ve not done the whole job. The level of expertise and commitment amongst our members, board and staff assure that we always challenge ourselves and each other to do our best.”

These days Scofield is focusing her efforts on marketing the organizations Hamilton Hill Food Processing products.

Faith & Hunger Update

The Faith & Hunger Network, a joint project of Hunger Action and Bread for the World, held two regional conferences this month in Westchester (Dec 6) and New York City (Dec 9). The goal of the conferences was to further build the faith advocacy community and strengthen the network of faith leaders and advocates fighting for social justice.

Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action Network presented information on the reauthorization of child nutrition programs and

discussed the moral imperative of making health care a human right. Derrick Boykin of Bread for the World discussed reforming foreign aid to support anti-poverty and development efforts. Dunlea and Boykin led a discussion on effective advocacy with elected officials and most attendees committed to attend an arranged meeting with their representatives.

Conferences are also being planned for LI, Buffalo, Albany and Poughkeepsie.

Raise NY Minimum Wage, Unemployment Benefits

Hunger Action Network used Black Friday – the busiest shopping day of the year – to launch a campaign to raise the state minimum wage.

The group is also urging State lawmakers to raise state unemployment benefits (e.g., raise the maximum from \$405 per week to \$475 per week) and to increase efforts to create more living wage jobs.

Hunger Action Network is seeking to raise the state minimum wage to \$10 an hour, and then index it to inflation. It is presently \$7.25 an hour. The purchasing power of the minimum wage was \$9.92 (in 2009 dollars) in 1969.

Hunger Action also said that the state should provide jobs for the unemployed and underemployed if the private sector fails to put people back to work.

Under state law, the Commissioner of Labor, Patricia Smith, has the power to raise the state minimum wage without legislative approval if the Commissioner concludes that the minimum wage is too low to support workers. Under State Labor Law, the review process is triggered by the submission of a petition from at least 50 low-income workers. Hunger Action recently met with Commissioner Smith to discuss her possible support for a wage hike.

“The number of people using emergency food programs in NYS has increased more than 60% in the last two years. Many of these individuals have jobs but the pay is too low to support their families. The minimum wage in NY unfortunately is a poverty wage. Others have lost their jobs during the recession. We need to raise both the minimum and maximum unemployment benefits. And the long-

term solution is a far more open and democratic process in how NYS uses its public dollars to create living wage jobs. One reform is the Governor’s recent proposal related to raising wages at jobs created through IDAs,” stated Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action Network.

“A fair minimum wage is a basic moral value for our country. Where elected officials set the minimum wage reflects whether our society truly believes that workers are human beings with inherent dignity, and rights that include the access to food, shelter and healthcare,” noted Rev. Debra Jameson of FOCUS.

“For too long, the minimum wage has not provided even a minimally adequate standard of living. It is morally wrong that people work full time but have to choose between paying the rent and paying for food, paying for childcare or paying for healthcare. A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it,” added Jameson, who coordinates a local food pantry and soup kitchen.

Hunger Action pointed out that an economic recession is a good time to raise the minimum wage. The federal minimum wage was enacted during the Great Depression to promote economic recovery. You can’t build a strong economy on poverty wages. The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Raising the minimum wage boosts consumer purchasing power and economic recovery.

When the federal minimum wage was established in 1938, the unemployment rate was still a very high 19 percent. President Franklin Roosevelt called the



minimum wage an essential part of economic recovery.

New York should phase in an increase in the maximum weekly benefit until it reaches half the state’s average weekly wage, and then index the maximum so that its purchasing power does not erode over time. Today’s maximum benefit amount replaces significantly less than half of the average weekly wage.

New York should also change its UI benefit systems so that lower wage workers – those making less than \$15 an hour – qualify for higher wage replacement rates. New Jersey, for example, provides a single mother with two dependents laid off from an \$8 per hour job with \$213 in weekly benefits compared to just \$160 in New York.

Hunger Action said it endorsed the proposals by the National Jobs for All Coalition. These include increased public investment, affordable child care, paid parental leave, and other family-friendly policies. The proposals also address reduced work time, protection of workers’ and union rights, living wages, adequate income support, anti-discrimination policies, rebuilding our cities, sound government finance, lifelong learning, military conversion, fair trade, and working towards a global New Deal.

Thanksgiving Action: End Child Hunger

Hunger Action Network helped coordinate news conferences in Albany, NYC and Westchester as part of the annual Thanksgiving Action Against Hunger.

A key focus was President Obama's pledge to end childhood hunger by 2015. Hunger Action said that Congress would need to fundamentally change nutrition, agriculture, economic and budget priorities to achieve this. The first step is to improve the child nutrition programs currently up for reauthorization in Congress.

The groups reported that emergency food programs across the state are feeding a record number of individuals. (see hunger article p. 3)

Children bore the brunt of the increases in 2008. The number of children in food insecure households jumped to 17 million last year from just over 12 million in 2007. A total of 22.6 percent of all children in the nation faced uncertainty in getting enough to eat. People of color were also disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

Crystal Hamelink of the Schenectady Inner City Ministry Program sees hungry children nearly every day. "Our kids are most vulnerable. When you feed hungry children, they wrap themselves around your heart. It is time to eliminate child hunger in America", said Hamelink.

"As people of faith, we are called to do what God requires and a piece of that is doing what is fair and just for our neighbors. The challenge we face is not lack of food but a more equitable way of distributing food, and, government leadership committed to making certain no one goes hungry," said Rev. Debra Jameson of FOCUS Churches, which operates a food pantry and breakfast programs in Albany.

President Obama's "Tackling Domestic Hunger" analysis made the important point that "The most effective way to eliminate childhood hunger and reduce hunger among adults is through a broad expansion of economic opportunity." To do that, he outlined a range of initiatives "to reduce and alleviate poverty, including providing permanent tax relief for working families, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, raising the minimum wage, and providing affordable, accessible health insurance."

"We urge Congress to use reauthorization to allow more children to access nutrition programs. Access to food should be a universal right. But we also agree with President Obama that ending hunger requires us to address more fundamental economic problems like the need for a robust minimum wage and targeted job creation in low-income communities. We must also heed the warning of former President Eisenhower to not allow the military budget to steal the resources we need to feed the hungry and house the homeless," said Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network.

Earl Eichelberger of the NYS Catholic Conference said that "Poverty in the US is a moral and social wound in the soul of our country. We have the resources to virtually eliminate poverty, especially long-term poverty, but we do not yet have the political will."

As the press conference was taking place at the Hour Children Food Pantry in Long Island City, a large line was forming outside for the food pantry's weekly distribution. More than one in five children in New York City has relied on EFPs such as this one for food since 2007. "It's so sad to see so many children's faces waiting for help at Food Pantries and Community Kitchens. No



(at Hour Children Food Pantry)

matter how nice and welcoming we make these programs, they are not the solution. Our kids deserve better," said Sr. Mary Alice Hannan, Executive Director of Part of the Solution.

Groups sponsoring the NYC event included City Harvest, Children's Defense Fund, Citizens' Committee for Children, Part of the Solution (POTS), The Partnership for the Homeless, Hour Children, and anti-hunger activist Lynn Rosen.

The Westchester Coalition for the Hungry and Homeless, Inc., which represents more than 140 food pantries and soup kitchens, reported that many of the programs have seen a 15% to 25% increase, with some reporting as much as a 50% increase. One in five Westchester residents needs emergency food assistance.

"Westchester is the 4th least affordable County in the US for rental costs. Far too often, our clients must choose between paying the rent and feeding their children," said Dennis Hanratty, Director of Mt. Vernon United Tenants.

Sponsors of the event included Mt. Vernon United Tenants, The Bridge Fund, Westchester Children's Association, WESPAC Foundation, St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Washingtonville Housing Alliance Westchester Economic Security Campaign, Hispanic Resource Center, and the Food Bank of Westchester.

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