



Getting to the Root of the Problem GRASSROOTS

The Newsletter of the Hunger Action Network of New York State

May 2011

Faces of Hunger Action Network

Kelly Ann Kowalski is the director of Food For All, a program of the Network of Religious Communities in Buffalo. She has been with the organization for ten years.

Food For All assists low-income families in obtaining Food Stamps and provides them with information about the Summer Food Service Program and the School Lunch Program.



Kelly also coordinates the Network of Religious Communities Food Pantry. The Food Pantry provides families with nutritious emergency food for three days.

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Congress Slashes Hunger Programs

The Hunger Action Network of NYS criticized the House of Representatives for slashing funding for a variety of anti-hunger programs at a time when domestic hunger is at record levels.

“Congress and the White House seem oblivious to the fact that we are in the midst of the greatest recession since the Great Depression, with unemployment rates for the poorest Americans in excess of 30%. Demand at emergency food programs in NYS has increased by more than 50% in the last few years, with more than 3 million New Yorkers needing help,” noted Mark Dunlea, Exec. Director of Hunger Action Network.

“More than 18% of Americans reported that could not afford to feed their families in 2010. Yet Congress wants to take food out of the mouth of struggling families to cut a budget deficit which they just blew up by spending \$900 billion to expand tax cuts primarily for the wealthiest Americans,” continued Dunlea.

The recent 2011 federal budget cut \$500 million from the federal Women, Infants and Children Program and reduced funding for emergency food and shelter (FEMA) by \$80 million (a 40% cut).

The 2012 House Republican budget proposal would slash funding for food stamps (SNAP), eliminating its entitlement status and turning it into a capped block grant to the states. SNAP would be cut \$127 billion — almost 20 percent — over the next ten years (2012-2021). Roughly two-thirds of Rep. Ryan’s proposed budget cuts would come from programs from low-income Americans .

The cuts follow the 2010 action in Congress, under Democratic leadership, to cut more than \$13 billion from food stamp benefits to provide fiscal relief to the states and to pay for a modest expansion of child nutrition programs.

“This reminds me very much of 1981, when the budget adopted by Congress under President Reagan led to an explosion of hunger across America. The number of emergency food programs in NYC rapidly grew from a few dozen to more than 1,300. We naively thought that the pantries and kitchens would

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Hunger Action Network of New York State

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PlaNYC 2.0 Puts Food on the Table

based on an article by Ed Yowell in www.foodsystemsny.org

NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg's 2011 Update to "PlaNYC 2020: A Greener, Greater NY" included the addition of a Food section. The Plan is the City's sustainability manifesto to meet the challenges of a growing population, an aging infrastructure, a changing, global economy, and climate change.

The Food Systems Network NYC had weighed in on the need to include food in the Plan. The group made ten recommendations urging the City "to put food on the table" by: ensuring access to good food within ¼ mile of each New Yorker; supporting alternative fresh food distribution systems; promoting good food education; supporting local and regional food production; improving channels of food distribution; evaluating empirically the City's food systems; supporting the development of a "green" food-based economic sector; encouraging government and private purchase of regionally produced food; and, creating a NYC Food Policy Council.

The Plan's Food Section says that "Healthy, sustainable food systems are critical to the well-being of our communities and central to our ability to accommodate a growing population."

On food production, the Plan includes: surveying municipal lands to identify properties suitable for urban agriculture or community gardens; facilitating agriculture projects at publicly-owned sites (by planting 129 new community gardens on NYC Housing Authority land and promoting school gardens); and reviewing regulations to remove barriers to creating community gardens and urban farms.

On distribution, it includes analyzing the City's foodshed and evaluating the environmental effects of our food systems and facilitating the re-design of the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market.

On consumption, it includes facilitating the creation of 300 healthy food retail options in underserved areas and continuing the use of City-owned land to foster entrepreneurship in food retail and processing.

And, on post-consumption, the Plan includes creating additional opportunities to recover organic materials (including food scraps, yellow grease, and yard waste) at community and commercial levels and pursuing energy-generating projects (such as food waste diversion at the Hunt's Point Food Distribution Center).

Hamilton Hill Kitchen Receives Grant for Job Training

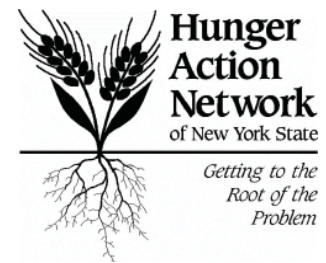
Hunger Action Network's has been awarded a grant from the Schenectady Foundation to further its job training and placement program.

The program is an intensive 16 week foodservice training program combining hands-on experience with classroom instruction, individual case management and job placement services. The program prepares at risk youth and disadvantaged men and women for jobs in the restaurant

and hospitality industry..

Students prepare over 5,000 nutritious kid friendly meals monthly which are served to Schenectady's Head Start sites.

Schenectady Foundation support will be used to expand the number of students being trained. By June 2012 the program will be able to train classes of 8 – 10 students and place 28 students into meaningful employment each year.



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JOBS Programs for Welfare Participants Show Promise

A new report by Hunger Action found that New York's recent welfare experiment with transitional jobs programs that combine education and training with a real job had shown promising results and should be expanded.

Hunger action called upon Gov. Cuomo to conduct a cost-benefit analysis comparing subsidized employment to workfare, which is the main welfare to work program in NY. New York relies on workfare much more than other states. The federal government consistently ranks New York among the worst states in helping to move individuals from welfare to work.

Hunger Action has also asked state lawmakers, the NYC City Council, Health and Human Services, and the State and NYC Comptroller to conduct such a cost-benefit analysis.

"Welfare participants want a job that will enable them to support their families. While we want a stronger and more compassionate safety net, we also want New York to have the best welfare to work program in the country rather than one of the worst. Two years ago under the leadership of OTDA Commissioner David Hansell New York began to move in the right direction by increasing investments in job programs. We need Governor Cuomo to commit to helping low-income New Yorkers find real, decent paying jobs," said Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of Hunger Action.

Even before their first year of funding was complete, subsidized employment programs enabled over one in four welfare jobs participants to make the transition to regular work; some counties had placement rates above 50%. Statewide, only about 14% of TANF participants leave welfare for employment in a given year, compared to a national average of 20%.

Unfortunately, while state lawmakers in the last two budget allocated \$85 million for a variety of welfare jobs programs, including Career Pathways, less than one million dollars (for wage subsidies) was included in the recent state budget (though \$15.5 million was restored for summer youth employment). Advocates had hoped that some of the \$960 million of federal welfare funds that the state diverts to the county as a block grant would have been allocated to continue funding the jobs initiatives.

Many of the individuals now remaining on welfare in New York State have multiple barriers to employment, thus requiring more assistance in becoming employable. The state's current emphasis on Jobs First, moving participants into any job under any condition before job training or education has not succeed in improving employability. Local districts lack mechanisms to effectively tie the participants into training and education programs (e.g., GED, adult literacy) once the person finds a job. Many of these individuals returned to welfare.

Hunger Action was disappointed that New York spent comparatively little of the \$1.2 billion in extra welfare dollars it received as part of the federal economic stimulus package on jobs programs. Larger states created five to eight times the number of job slots that New York did. Even smaller states like Kentucky created more jobs positions.

Several years ago, at the request of Community Voices Heard, the Fiscal Policy Institute did a Return on Investment Study for a proposed Transitional Jobs program. The study found that, while the program had a direct cost of \$80 million to provide for an annual 4,000 subsidized transitional job slots, the net cost is only \$49 million, and within three years the statewide initiative could pay for itself.

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Medicare isn't the Problem, it's the Solution (by Robert Reich)

I hope when (Obama) tells America how he aims to tame future budget deficits the president doesn't accept conventional Washington wisdom that the biggest problem in the federal budget is Medicare (and its poor cousin Medicaid).

Medicare isn't the problem. It's the solution.

The real problem is the soaring costs of health care that lie beneath Medicare. They're costs all of us are bearing in the form of soaring premiums, co-payments, and deductibles.

Americans spend more on health care per person than any other advanced nation and get less for our money. Yearly public and private health care spending is \$7,538 per person. That's almost two and a half times the average of other advanced nations.

Yet the typical American lives 77.9 years — less than the average 79.4 years in other advanced nations. And we have the highest rate of infant mortality of all advanced nations.

Medical costs are soaring because our health care system is totally messed up. Doctors and hospitals have every incentive to spend on unnecessary tests, drugs, and procedures.

You have lower back pain? Almost 95% of such cases are best relieved through physical therapy. But doctors and hospitals routinely do expensive MRI's, and then refer patients to orthopedic surgeons who often do even more costly surgery. Why? There's

not much money in physical therapy.

America spends \$30 billion a year fixing medical errors — the worst rate among advanced countries. Why? Among other reasons because we keep patient records on computers that can't share the data.

Meanwhile, administrative costs eat up 15 to 30 percent of all health care spending in the United States. That's twice the rate of most other advanced nations. Where does this money go? Mainly into collecting money: Doctors collect from hospitals and insurers, hospitals collect from insurers, insurers collect from companies or from policy holders.

A major occupational category at most hospitals is "billing clerk." A third of nursing hours are devoted to documenting what's happened so insurers have proof.

Trying to slow the rise in Medicare costs doesn't deal with any of this. It will just limit the amounts seniors can spend, which means less care.

Paul Ryan's plan — to give seniors vouchers they can cash in with private for-profit insurers — would be even worse. It would funnel money into the hands of for-profit insurers, whose ad-

ministrative costs are far higher than Medicare.

So what's the answer? For starters, allow anyone at any age to join Medicare. Medicare's administrative costs are in the range of 3 percent. That's well below the 5 to 10 percent costs borne by large companies that self-insure. It's even further below the administrative costs of companies in the small-group market (amounting to 25 to 27 percent of premiums). And it's way, way lower than the administrative costs of individual insurance (40 percent). It's even far below the 11 percent costs of private plans under Medicare Advantage, the current private-insurance option under Medicare.

In addition, allow Medicare — and its poor cousin Medicaid — to use their huge bargaining leverage to negotiate lower rates with hospitals, doctors, and pharmaceutical companies. This would help move health care from a fee-for-the-most-costly-service system into one designed to get the highest-quality outcomes most cheaply.

Estimates of how much would be saved by extending Medicare to cover the entire population range from \$58 billion to \$400 billion a year. More Americans would get quality health care, and the long-term budget crisis would be sharply reduced.



Let me say it again: Medicare isn't the problem. It's the solution.

Robert Reich is the former Secretary of Labor and currently a professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley

Raise the Minimum Wage

Hunger Action is urging the Governor and State lawmakers to raise the state minimum wage to \$10 an hour.

Assemblymember Keith Wright, chair of the Assembly Labor Committee, is expected to introduce just such legislation. The NYS AFL-CIO is supporting the effort. Hunger Action's members in Rochester are urging Sen. Robach, their local Senator and chair of the Senate Labor committee, to sponsor the increase.

The state minimum wage is presently \$7.15 an hour, ten cents below the federal minimum wage. Most workers receive the higher of the federal and state minimum wage. The purchasing power of the minimum wage was \$9.92 (in 2009 dollars) in 1969.

A recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 67 percent of respondents favor hiking the minimum wage to \$10 an hour. Even a majority of Republicans -- 51 percent -- favor the higher minimum wage.

Hunger Action submitted a petition to the State Labor Department during the Paterson administration to use its statutory authority to administratively raise the wage if it found that the wage was inadequate to support workers. The Paterson administration failed to take any action on our petition. The Cuomo administration has also not yet responded.

"The number of people using emergency food programs in New York State has increased more than 60% in the last three years. Many of these individuals have jobs but the pay is too low to support their families. We need to raise

the minimum wage so working families can support themselves." 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 Churches.

"The minimum wage does not provide 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, childcare or healthcare. It is morally wrong that some are paid so little their children go without necessities. A job should keep you out of poverty, not

the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

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. It would put a floor under worker wages, alleviate the hardship of inadequate wages, and stimulate the economy and job creation by increasing consumer purchasing power. The federal minimum wage was also meant to promote economic development and stop the original race to the bottom of employers moving to cheaper labor states in a downward spiral.

In a recent editorial in favor of raising the minimum wage, the NY Times stated "Opponents argue that raising the minimum wage would inevitably lead to higher unemployment, prompting companies to cut jobs and decamp to cheaper labor markets. Yet with unemployment likely to remain painfully high for years to come, this argument amounts to a promise that the working poor will remain poor for a long time."

The Times added: "What's more, we know now that the argument is grossly overstated. Over the past 15 years, states and cities around the country have rushed ahead

of the federal government to impose higher minimum wages. Economists analyzing the impact of the increases on jobs have concluded that moderate increases have no discernible impact on joblessness. Employers did not rush off to cheaper labor markets in the suburbs or across state lines for a simple reason: that costs money too."



keep you in it," added Jameson, who coordinates an Albany food pantry and soup kitchen.

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. The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in

Green Space



Farm Bill Up For Reauthorization

The Farm (and Food) Bill is how Congress shapes our food system. The bulk of the funding goes for food stamps. The Farm Bill also provides various subsidies to help farmers.

Congress is supposed to reauthorize the Farm Bill in 2012 - something it does every five years. But the funding for the Farm Bill is already under attack.

As noted in other articles, Congress has been slashing food stamp funding. They also want to go after the farm subsidies. Many groups want to reform the subsidies to direct them to family farms; most now go to large, wealthy corporate agribusiness. But with prices for commodities near all time high, many Congress members just want to cut all the subsidies to reduce the budget deficit.

Hunger Action supports a major overhaul of the Farm bill - to better help family farmers, to end hunger, to support rural development, to promote better nutrition.

Low-income people are especially harmed by the Farm Bill. Food stamp benefits are too low to adequately feed a family. The Farm Bill also promotes unhealthy diets, since its subsidies go to overly processed foods high on salt, fats and sugars. It makes calories like fried food cheap but nutritional food like fruits and vegetables expensive.

There often isn't a supermarket or a source of fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods - a problem known as food deserts. Yet there are dozens of fast food joints peddling overly processed, fried food that contribute to a myriad of health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.

With hardly any subsidies or fruits and vegetables, their price in stores increased by nearly 40% over 15 years while the real price of soft drinks (liquid



corn syrup) declined by 23 percent.

Nor does the Farm Bill do a good job of helping family farmers. Most of the cash payments go to large agribusiness - whose owners live in places like Manhattan or Chicago or LA. Two-thirds of U.S. farmers receive no payments. As a result, the rural counties that have the highest level of commodity payments also have the highest rate of poverty.

Cash payments made to farmers growing mostly five crops—corn, wheat, cotton, rice and soybeans. These crops are primarily grown in the center of the

country, leaving many farm states like NY out.

The Farm Bill should be overhauled to help small farmers and rural development, make school lunches healthier, strengthen the food safety net for low income Americans, promote local sustainable and organic food systems, and tackle agriculture's daunting environmental and conservation problems.

The farm bill should generate new jobs and strengthen small businesses in rural

communities by investing in rural infrastructure (such as better telecommunications systems), supporting rural entrepreneurs, and promoting local initiatives to revitalize rural towns.

Increase funding is needed for the SNAP / Food Stamp Program while making it easier for hungry individuals to receive help. Benefits need to be increase dto support a more nutritious diet. SNAP should provide

incentives for purchase of fruits and vegetables that would also strengthen local and regional farm-to-market connections.

The present farm Bill also creates hunger in third world countries. The five crops that receive the most subsidies are also the ones that have caused food riots worldwide. By subsidizing these crops for American growers, we undercut small farms in poor countries, pushing them off the land - and making food less available to the poor.

NYC's Community Gardens - an endangered species?

Proposed cuts to the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) would eliminate crucial community development programs across the nation, including GreenThumb. The largest community gardening program in the country, GreenThumb supports over 500 community gardens in NYC with workshops and tools.

The 2012 Federal Budget (HR1) proposed by the US House of Representatives would remove funding from the CDBG for the rest of 2011, as well as cut future funding by 60%. This could eliminate GreenThumb altogether, or cut its budget by 60% at the very least.

Gardeners and community food security advocates city-wide are urging people to reach out to their elected officials to:

Keep GreenThumb and all CDBG funded programs in NYC!

Sen. Chuck Schumer
757 Third Ave, Suite 17-02
New York, NY 10017
212-486-4430
www.Schumer.Senate.gov

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
780 Third Ave, Suite 2601
New York, NY 10017
212-688-6262
www.Gillibrand.Senate.gov

And protect and increase the proposed funding to sustain GreenThumb's essential work on a city level:

Mayor Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007 311
(or 212-NEW-YORK outside NYC)
www.NYC.gov/Mayor

Speaker Quinn
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007
212-788-7210
www.council.nyc.gov

Your City Council Representative: Go to www.council.nyc.gov to find contact info.

Please contact your elected officials and make your voice heard. Community gardens, as well as the numerous programs that CDBG supports, need your support!

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear.....

Community gardens play an essential role in our city. In addition to the healthy vegetables that gardeners produce, gardens help build a sense of community and beautify our neighborhoods.

In many of our neighborhoods families can not otherwise easily access affordable fresh produce.

I urge you to support community garden programs to help keep our neighborhoods, united and healthy.

Grow an Extra Row

Springtime means garden planning and seed starting.

What will you grow this season? Where should it be planted? Which varieties grew best last year? As you consider these questions, here's another one for you: why not commit to fighting hunger in your community in a concrete, direct way?

Growing an extra row or two of vegetables in your garden and donating the produce to your local food pantry or soup kitchen is one clear action you can take to fight hunger. By planting some extra vegetable rows you can support overburdened food programs and the millions of New Yorkers who rely on them to feed themselves and their families. Fresh produce is always in high demand at these programs and is a welcome change from canned, dry goods.

Dedicate one or two rows (or for container gardeners, one or two extra planters) as you plan your garden now. Come harvest time, contact your local food pantry or soup kitchen to arrange drop-off times. Or, contact us by phone or email to get connected with food programs in your area.



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May 12 Protest Targets Wall Street

Kelly has been interested in and involved with various human service groups for most of her adult life. She volunteered nineteen years at the Fresh Air Fund, which brings New York City kids to other parts of the state to experience life in the suburbs and countryside. After years of learning about hunger issues, Kelly realized that she was most passionate about teaching people good nutrition and how to do it themselves.

Kelly has been involved with the Garden Project of the Food Bank of WNY since 2004, and is the coordinator of the project. The Garden Project teaches income-eligible families how to grow and use their own fresh fruits and vegetables in an environmentally conscious way.

This year she taught a canning class at the Food Bank of WNY where Garden Project participants learned how to preserve tomatoes from their own garden beds. Her concern for the health of low-income families and seniors has led Kelly to take part in the Diabetes Initiative, for which she taught classes about diabetes prevention and healthy living.

Kelly says “ I grew up in a family that was always concerned with the well-being of those are less fortunate. My parents were always involved with charitable organizations, so it made sense for me to make a career out of something that feels so natural to me, giving and helping out those who are in need. Although giving food to low-income people feels so important, I am more interested in helping to create long-term solutions to hunger and poverty. I want people to not need food pantries or dining halls. The Hunger Action Network is a great fit for me, as HANNYS is able to advocate and influence public policy on a state and national level.”

Hunger Action Network of NYS joined with as many as 20,000 other protestors on Wall Street on May 12 protest Mayor Bloomberg’s proposed budget cuts and to call for wealthy New Yorkers and Wall Street to pay their fair share of the city’s tax revenues. Bloomberg is proposing to cut more than \$400 million in essential human service funding.

The May 12th coalition is calling for the City to stop over one billion dollars worth of current subsidies, tax credits and special low-cost energy deals with the “Big Six” banks (JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley), demands \$100 million back from banks that didn’t create jobs, and seeks repayment of over \$200 million in current and recent-year subsidies. The Big Six banks have over \$600 million in current contracts with City government for services – it’s only fair to cut what banks are paid for these contracts by 20% to save \$120 million when non-profits and other contractors and agencies are facing similar cuts.

The rally was the culmination of a week of protests targeting the City’s financial community, which often fails to pay taxes while receiving huge tax breaks.

“It is easy for billionaires like Bloomberg to forget that we are in the greatest recession since the great depression. The number of people using our city’s food pantries and soup kitchens has increased more than 50% over the last three years. Rather than cutting vital human service programs, we need to strengthen the safety net while funding a major public jobs initiative to put New Yorkers back to work. Nationwide the unemployment rate for the poorest Americans is 30%. Somehow the lack of jobs isn’t an issue for many of our elected officials,,” said Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Ac-

tion Network of NYS.

“Instead of rebating \$14 billion annually to Wall Street speculators, the state and city should keep the proceeds from the stock transfer tax and fund a WPA style jobs program. \$14 billion is enough to create 500,000 community jobs that pay between \$14 to \$17 an hour. We also support the proposals laid out in the recent report by the May 12th coalition to capture more than \$1.5 billion in subsidies, sweetheart deals and tax loopholes that big banks and the super-rich receive from the City. This economic collapse was caused by the greed and misdeeds of Wall Street but so for politicians have only bailed out the bankers while cutting programs for everyone else,” noted Dunlea.

The revenues from the stock transfer tax used to be dedicated to the city’s coffers. When the state decided to begin rebating the stock transfer tax back to Wall Street traders, it initially provided other revenues to the city in compensation; it later however decided to discontinue the payments. (The tax itself is still collected.)

The richest 1% of NYC residents now receive 45% of the income in the city, a dramatic increase from thirty years ago. The last time the country saw such great income disparity was in 1927, which led to the Great Depression. When the wealthy have all the money, consumer demand dries up and the economy falls apart.



State Budget Eliminates Welfare Hike - Approves Deep Cuts in Services

State lawmakers agreed with Governor Cuomo to halt the last year of the three-year phase-in of an increase in the basic welfare grant in the 2011-12 state budget adopted in the early hours of March 30.

“Poor people just don’t count in Albany. Lawmakers should be ashamed of themselves. The poor just don’t have the campaign contributions to get legislators to do what is right. Poor children are the biggest victims of this decision,” remarked Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action Network.

At the same time that Cuomo was taking the \$29 million welfare grant hike away from poor New Yorkers, he won a \$5 billion tax cut for the wealthiest New Yorkers by refusing to extend the temporary income tax surcharge. (Speaker Silver has introduced legislation to keep the Tax, which doesn’t expire until the end of the year.)

Funding for human service, education and health care programs were slashed to resolve the state’s \$9 billion budget deficit.

One piece of good news was the defeat of the “full family” sanction proposal to cut welfare benefits for the entire family, including children, if an adult was “sanctioned” was defeated. Funding for emergency food programs continued at \$29.7 million.

Funding for subsidized employment programs for welfare participants was virtually eliminated, though \$900,000 was provided for wage subsidy. (The state may be able to come up with \$4 million in unexpended funds to con-

tinue transitional jobs this year.) \$15.5 million was restored for summer youth employment.

As lawmakers rushed to meet the April 1 budget deadline, demonstrators from community organizations, labor and student groups organized a Wisconsin-style occupation of the Capitol to protest the devastating cuts, with hundreds sleeping on the floor overnight. Lawmakers illegally shut down the galleries to the legislative chambers to try to mute the protests.



The prior week Hunger Action led a protest outside of the Stock Exchange on Wall Street. Hunger Action wants NY to keep

the \$14 billion from the stock transfer tax rather than rebating it to Wall Street speculators. The \$14 billion would have resolved the state budget deficit. The \$14 billion could also be used to fund 500,000 community jobs in a WPA style jobs program. The jobs would pay \$14 to \$17 an hour.

After the protest, HANNYS joined with thousands of labor, community and student activists for a budget protest in front of City Hall.

The groups plan to continue to work together to challenge the increasing attacks on working and poor Americans. Tens of thousands poured into the streets around Wall Street on May 12 to protest Mayor Bloomberg’s proposed NYC budget cuts and to call for a halt of \$1.5 billion in tax giveaways to large banks.

The state basic welfare grant had not been raised since Mario Cuomo was Governor in 1991. The combined welfare grant had fallen to only 40% of the federal poverty level. Two years ago state lawmakers agreed to a three year phased-in increase of the basic grant of 10% a year. This amounted to a \$1 a day increase for each of the three years for a family of three. (The basic grant for a family of 3 had been \$291 a month.)

The state has an extra \$1.3 billion in welfare dollars available this year from the federal government to pay for the small grant increase. While claiming the state had to save \$29 million by delaying the meager increase, Governor Cuomo diverted \$960 million of welfare funds to for FFF block grant to local welfare districts; advocates view this as thinly disguised fiscal relief.

Overall, so-called TANF (welfare) initiatives were cut \$47.8 million or 66% from last year.

The state budget eliminated \$35 million in funding for NYC’s controversial Advantage Work program that serves households at risk of eviction or already residing in homeless shelter. Advocates want the \$35 million included in Bloomberg’s initial proposed budget for Advantage to be rolled into the “new” program. Discussions continue but the City appears to be withdrawing the prior funding.

School aid was cut \$1.3 billion to \$19.6 billion. The Governor ignored the court order to provide increased funding to low-income school districts.

The Medicaid budget was cut \$2.3 billion. The final Budget rejected several proposals that would have restricted access to care, including increases in co-payments for Medicaid, Family Health Plus and Child Health Plus,

Vermont Falling Short on Single Payer

With the insurance companies having won a national insurance mandate from Congress, with even the meager public option plan having been swept away, universal health care advocates have turned their attention to the states.

Hunger Action worked with Single Payer NY to organize a lobby day on single payer on May 23rd at the State Capitol. Led by Assembly Health Committee chair Richard Gottfried, single payer legislation is being introduced in both houses.

Much excitement has been generated by Vermont, where Peter Shumlin, the new Governor, is a strong proponent of a single payer system. It looked like the state was ready to embrace a single payer system after an independent report commissioned by the state concluded that single payer was the best solution. On May 26th the Governor will sign a new universal health care bill into law. But as outlined below by the Physicians for a National Health Program, the bill falls short of a true single payer system. .

A major problem that states will face in enacting their own single payer plan is getting needed waivers from Congress and/or the federal administration. While states are allowed to develop their own programs under certain conditions, the new law doesn't allow them to do that until 2017 - three years after they are required to implement the new federal law. Efforts are underway to allow states to start their own programs in 2014.

Several years ago, Hunger Action and other universal health care advocates were able to get the state to fund a cost-benefit analysis of the various approaches to universal health care. Despite clear opposition by the health care staff for the Spitzer-Paterson administration, the report concluded that single payer was the

best choice for NY - saving more than \$20 billion annually once implemented by 2019. The savings compared to the insurance mandate passed by Congress would be \$28 billion annually.

The measure passed in Vermont creates a powerful five-member Green Mountain Care Board, members of which will determine the benefits and craft a funding plan for Green Mountain Care, a state universal health plan. The board would have wide authority over state health spending and health system



reform.

The measure will set up a health insurance exchange in which Vermonters will shop for private health plans and enroll in public coverage. The exchange is to begin enrolling residents in November 2013 and be fully operational by January 2014. The bill calls for at least two private health insurance plans to participate in the exchange.

Below is a summary of the statement on Vermont by the national Physicians for a National Health Program.

Many journalists and commentators have portrayed the Vermont bill as fully

embracing the single-payer approach to reform. However, the bill passed by the Vermont House falls well short of the single-payer reform needed to resolve the health care crisis. Indeed, as the bill moved through the House the term "single payer" was entirely removed, and restrictions on the role of private insurers were loosened.

The legislation lays out Vermont's version of the federal reform. However, it offers only a vague outline of the additional reform promised by the governor and Legislature at such time when states will be allowed to experiment with alternatives to the federal program in 2017 (or 2014, if the effort to move up the date succeeds).

The Vermont plan promises a public program open to all residents of the state in 2017, but even then it would allow a continuing role for private insurance. This would negate many of the administrative savings that could be attained by a true single-payer program, and opens the way for the continuation of multi-tiered care.

The plan would perpetuate incentives for hospitals and ACOs to cherry-pick profitable patients and services, and hobble the health planning needed to assure rational investments in new facilities and high-technology care. Many patients would continue to face co-payments that obstruct access to care, and the bill makes no mention of expanding coverage of long-term care. Finally, the bill offers no concrete funding plan or structure for the public program that it promises.

We applaud the sentiments expressed by the governor and legislative leaders and remain hopeful that the legislation's rhetorical commitment to further reform will become a reality.

Living Wage Law for NYC

Hunger Action Network has joined with other NYC anti-hunger group to support passage of an expanded Living Wage Law for NYC. The groups include the NYC Coalition Against Hunger, the Food Bank For NYC, City Harvest, and the Westside Campaign Against Hunger.

The Living Wage NYC Coalition is seeking to establish a living wage standard for jobs tied to taxpayer-subsidized economic development projects.

Existing NYC law defines a living wage as a minimum of \$10 per hour with benefits, or \$11.50 per hour without benefits. NYC passed a living wage law in 2002, but the law only covers a limited number of workers. This bill would also index the Living Wage law to inflation.

The anti-hunger groups sent a joint letter to NYC Council Speaker Christine

Quinn urging her to back the bill. The groups pointed to an alarming hunger crisis among low-income New Yorkers, many of whom are now worrying about basic survival.

“Everyone agrees that those who work should make enough to support their families. For more than fifteen years Hunger Action has helped pass living wage laws in communities across the state. It is time to require that jobs created through tax subsidies lift our communities up rather than add more people to the soup kitchen lines,” stated Mark Dunlea

“All too often, low-income New Yorkers are finding themselves having to choose between purchasing food or paying bills that keep a roof over their heads,” said Lucy Cabrera, Ph.D., President of the Food Bank For New York City. “Research by the Marist College Institute

for Public Opinion and the Food Bank shows that 40 percent of low-income New Yorkers with household income of less than \$25,000 have had to choose between paying for food and rent/mortgage, or food and utilities. ”

“Twenty-four percent of the 9000 households who come to West Side Campaign Against Hunger for emergency food are working people who do not earn sufficient to meet their basic needs”, said Doreen Wohl, executive director. “These are people working as cashiers, child care providers, cleaners and maintenance workers, factory workers, in food service, as home attendants, and in retail. Fifty-nine percent of customer households have a weekly income between zero and \$200 a week, another twenty-eight percent have incomes between \$201 and \$400 a week. After paying rent little is left for food.”

Spending Cuts Unravel Safety Net

Ending more than six-and-a-half months of budget stalemate, Congress agreed to the seventh in a series of continuing resolutions (CRs) on April 15 that reduces government services by more than \$38 billion in the current fiscal year. The main battlefield this time around was domestic discretionary programs, for which Congress must determine funding levels annually

The budget agreement removes nearly \$13 billion from programs at the Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. Housing and transportation programs were also significantly reduced. Another \$1 billion in savings is realized in an across-the-board cut of domestic agencies.

Congress had to enact another CR just to have enough time to fill in the details of the legislation, as thousands of budget line items had to be negotiated. “You may not be surprised to hear this, but they’re still sifting through the ar-

reas where they are going to make cuts,” said Representative Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), the senior Democrat on the House Budget Committee, several days after the general agreement was announced

Immediate and substantial reductions were approved for historically important programs serving low-income people. Head Start services for preschoolers were cut by \$1 billion. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) was slashed by \$405 million – leaving little funding for anti-poverty activities for the remainder of the fiscal year. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) endured a reduction of some \$2.5 billion, nearly two-thirds of total funding. And the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) suffered a \$400 million loss during one of the longest and snowiest winters on record.

Nutrition assistance programs were

nicked but not devastated this time. Most significantly affected were: the WIC Program, where \$747 million held in reserve for caseload or food price increases were eliminated; the Emergency Food and Shelter Program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which was reduced by \$100 million; the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which lost \$20 million, an amount that will prevent six new states from starting up previously approved services for the low-income elderly.

Several small anti-hunger initiatives were zeroed out and left with no federal support, including \$6 million in infrastructure grants for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the \$5 million Hunger-Free Communities grant program, and \$3 million in fellowship programs at the Congressional Hunger Center.

Taken from California Emergency Food Network

Hunger Programs from page 1

Access to PA Campaign

soon shut down once Congress realized what they had done by slashing funding for programs such as public housing. We were wrong,” stated Dunlea.

Congress never corrected their mistakes. Thirty years later, many low-income Americans now have to spend 50% or more of their income on housing, a major problem that drives up the demand at emergency food programs.

In 1980, the richest 1% of New Yorkers received 10% of the state’s income. Today they get 35%. The last time there was just great income inequality in America was 1927, right before the Great Depression. When the wealthy has such a huge share of the nation’s income, the economy collapses due to a lack of consumer demand.

The People’s Budget being advanced by the Congressional Progressive Caucus is a better starting point to resolve the budget deficit and end the recession. The People’s Budget would close the deficit by raising taxes on the rich, taming health care costs (e.g., negotiating drug prices) and ending the military spending on wars and wasteful weapons systems. It would protect Social Security, including raising the taxable maximum. It seeks to Reduce unemployment—and thus the deficit—through extensive investment in infrastructure, clean energy, transportation and education.

Hunger Action would go further by enacting a single payer health care system and creating a WPA-style jobs program to put people to work.

Hunger Action is helping with a campaign by the Economic Justice and Social Welfare Network to improve access to public assistance for low-income New Yorkers. While many of the groups working on the campaign have focused on NY, Hunger Action is helping to make sure statewide problems are addressed as well.

Since the new welfare TANF program was created in 1996, the number of eligible poor children receiving assistance has dropped dramatically, from about two-thirds of eligible children being helped to only one-third. Not only have the rules become more restrictive, but local welfare offices are making it harder for households to receive the cash assistance they are legally entitled to.

While most local districts now promote participation in food stamps as a form of work supplement, many districts make it quite clear that they seek to divert needy households away from receiving cash (public) assistance. While the districts claim they are seeking other ways to help such families, far too many fall through the cracks.

In addition, even if they are able to make it onto assistance, many find themselves being “sanctioned” for alleged failure to comply with district rules (e.g., failed to show up for one of dozens of required appointments or work assignments). Almost everyone who challenges such sanctions win due to mistakes by the welfare districts.

Low-income New Yorkers experiencing the worst effects of the Great Recession have a right to a welfare system that stabilizes lives in economic crisis. Yet while food stamp participation has soared, public assistance participation has remained relatively flat. A recent estimate noted that only 16% of improv-

erished women in New York received cash assistance in 2008.

According to state data, HRA’s denials due to “failure to meet application requirements” have increased from 50% in 2007 to 78% in 2009. When HRA’s eligibility decisions are reviewed through the State’s administrative Fair Hearing process, HRA loses 96% of the time

Critics charge that HRA and other local districts are better at locking New Yorkers out than helping them out. Applicant experiences provide insight into this problem. Some applicants are improperly denied their legal right to apply for benefits, aren’t provided with proper disabilities screening, are offered inaccurate eligibility information, or are pressured to withdraw an application after submitting it. Onerous application procedures are difficult and time-intensive, and administrative mistakes frequently prevent people from accessing or maintaining assistance.

The campaign wants local advocates to share the story of your experiences, or those of your clients. Individual experiences help us illustrate for policy makers why we need changes. Were you (or your clients) discouraged to apply when trying to secure benefits? Were you provided with incorrect information as you attempted to maintain them? Were you denied benefits because you were unable to make it to all of your eligibility appointments? Did a computer glitch or administrative mistake result in a denied application or loss of benefits?

You can contact Greg Richane at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (grichane@fpwa.org) to share the details of your story.

Time for a Peace Dividend

Congress is headed for a major showdown in the next few months over the 2012 federal budget and the growing national debt.

The country faces the greatest recession - and the greatest income inequality - since the Great Depression. Tea Party activists want to cut government spending - while supporting massive tax cuts for the wealthy. Core programs that define our social contract - Social Security and Medicare - are under assault. Anti-hunger programs are being slashed.

But for the first time in many years the massive military budget is under scrutiny, from both liberals and conservatives.

Many Americans don't know that until the end of WWII that the US never had a major permanent military or arms industry. That our military was to defend our country, not to serve as the "policeman" of the world. Once a particular war was over, the military shrunk back.

50 years ago in his farewell address President Eisenhower, the leader of the combined Allied forces in WWII, warned the country to guard against the growing power of the military industry complex as America shifted to the Cold War against to the Soviet Union and the perceived threat that "communism" posed to America's expanding multinational corporations.

"This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city... The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist," warned Eisenhower.

After the Cold War ended, the United

States missed a golden opportunity to use a "peace dividend" to transform the defense sector into the core of a new manufacturing system. The US saw instead an erosion of our manufacturing base, as our products can't compete globally and our workers lose jobs to outsourcing. Despite the clear danger on continued reliance on imported fossil fuels, we failed to invest in sustainable alternatives and develop world-class green technology. And the excessive size of our military encouraged U.S. leaders to use these capabilities in a series of wars that further saddled the country with debt. (see www.fpif.org/reports/greendividend)

Countries, like individuals, rarely get second chances. But the debate over the national debt gives the US another key opportunity to shift resources from the military sector to meet the pressing needs of the country and the world. The US remains mired in an economic recession. We face the twin threats of energy and climate crises. Huge sums of money are required to fix our health care system, revive our educational system, and repair our infrastructure.

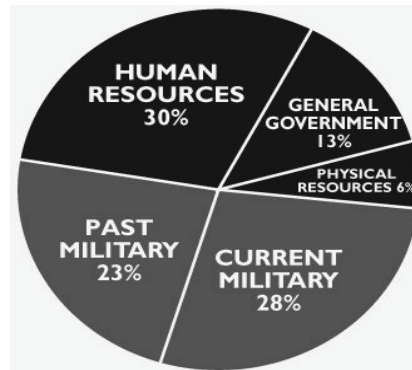
The obvious solution is to reduce military spending and invest in green technology that reduces our dependency on fossil fuels, shrinks our carbon footprint, and creates jobs. Such a "green stimulus" could pull our economy out of recession. Other countries, such as China and South Korea, have pursued something similar.

The trick of the green dividend is to ensure that new manufacturing jobs are created to replace the defense sector

employment.

The U.S. spends as much as the rest of the world combined on its military. Of those 195 nations, the U.S. has some kind of military presence in about 150, and more than 700 bases in at least 60. The military budget almost doubled during the eight years of the Bush administration. More than half of all U.S. annual discretionary budget spending goes to the military and war fighting.

We can cut military spending substantially without endangering the country's security. In November 2008, the Defense Business Board, a Pentagon oversight body, said that major systematic cuts were absolutely necessary because the Pentagon's budget was not sustainable. President Obama has cited \$295 billion in annual cost overruns alone. Here is a list of potential cuts totaling \$255 billion.



Withdraw in a timely fashion from Iraq = \$105 billion in year one

Withdraw from Afghanistan = 25 billion

Eliminate wasteful weapons systems = 33 billion

Reduce active nuclear warheads = 16 billion

Close half of US overseas military bases = 51 billion

Trim unused air wings and sea forces = 5 billion

Eliminated waste in procurement and operations = 20 billion

Bread for the World Founder comes to Schenectady



Art Simon, Founder of Bread for the World, spoke at a Faith and Hunger Network event in Schenectady on Saturday April 2nd at the Emmanuel Friedens Church,.

Drawing from his most recent book, "The Rising of Bread for the World - An Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger", Rev. Simon discussed the need for faith members to engage in political advocacy to help create a world based on their values, starting with ending hunger.

Art, the brother of former US Senator Paul Simon, was a Lutheran Pastor in the Lower East Side of NYC. In the early 1960s Simon knew something had to be done beyond dispensing food -- something that attacked hunger at the roots. He created Bread for the World, which has grown into the country's foremost citizens lobby on the issue. Its 61,000 members and their annual letter-writing campaign have helped to generate billions for the cause at home and abroad.

Bread's philosophy is taken from an adage Simon's father often shared with him: that it is better to build a fence at the top of a cliff than to have an ambulance at the bottom. Bread is a Christian group but works in an ecumenical manner. Faith groups have for years done good work with private aid, but to be effective we must become public policy advocates as well. Hunger is too big an issue to be tackled by private aid or public programs alone.

All faith groups have a calling to help the poor and take action relying on their faith. Bread for the World adds

a unique, sincere, and powerful voice to the effort. Getting legislative action around hunger depends on letters and Calls from constituents. It is the only



power Bread has, and the history of the organization shows the powerful results it can achieve.

Derrick Boykin presented on Bread's 2011 Offering of Letters to reform US foreign aid to focus more on ending poverty. Bread for the World urges Congress and the administration to press forward with reforms to make U.S. foreign assistance more effective in reducing poverty. These reforms will help millions of people move out of hunger and poverty.

The main driver of poverty reduction in the world is the hard work of poor people themselves. Given the opportunity to improve their communities and provide a better life for their children, they will seize it. We need to make sure U.S. foreign aid reaches those who need it most and that it supports their efforts to lift themselves, their families, and their communities out of poverty.

Over the last decade, Bread for the

World members have helped triple U.S. funding for assistance programs that are focused on reducing hunger and poverty and promoting economic development in poor countries. The rate of chronically hungry people in developing countries has fallen from 20 percent to 16 percent.

Congress has started drafting reform-legislation, including a possible overhaul of portions of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the legal basis of our government's overseas development work. Bread seeks changes on four fronts:

- A stronger U.S. government focus on reducing poverty;
- Clearer accountability for how U.S. aid dollars are spent and their results
- A transformed U.S. development agency
- U.S. aid that meets the needs and wants of local people



*Food that's in
When School
is out*

HUNGER ACTION NETWORK OF NEW YORK STATE MEMBERSHIP COUPON

- Yes, I want to help end the root causes of hunger by becoming a member:
- \$30 Individual \$5(low/fixed income)
- \$40 small organization \$75 medium organization \$150 large organization
- Here is my donation of _____
- Please send me information about volunteer opportunities

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (eve.) _____ (FAX) _____ (E-Mail) _____

Please make checks payable to and return to Hunger Action Network of NYS, 275 State St., Albany NY 12210

THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

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Bronx & Brooklyn Lead Country in Hunger

The South Bronx once again had the highest incidence of hunger in America with parts of Brooklyn not far behind.

The annual national rate of food hardship – the inability to afford enough food for a household – was 18 percent in 2010. No community was immune: in 324 of the 436 congressional districts, 15 percent or more of all respondent households reported food hardship in the 2009-2010 period.

The report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) analyzed data gathered by the Gallup poll.

NY Congressional District 16 in the South Bronx, represented by Cong. Serano, had the highest rate of food hardship in the country - 32.7%. NY CD 10 (Bed-Stuy, East NY, Flatbush) had the sixth highest rate - 29.1%.

One in four Americans is worried about having enough money to put food on the table in the next year. That's one of the main findings from a new survey com-

missioned by FRAC and Tyson Foods, Inc. The survey, which was conducted by Hart Research Associates, aimed to explore Americans' perceptions of hunger. Findings include:

- A vast majority (91 percent) of Americans are committed to the principle that no one should go hungry in the U.S.

- More than one-third of those surveyed indicated they have a direct connection to hunger.

- More than half (54 percent) said that more should be spent to address hunger compared to other problems, and nearly three-quarters saw a major hunger relief role for the federal government.

- The federal nutrition programs – like SNAP and school meals – are seen by more than 70 percent as highly effective ways to combat hunger.

A January 2011 report by FRAC found that NYC continues to be among the worst large cities in the country in terms

of the number of eligible children receiving school breakfast. NY is now ranked the third lowest in the country (a small improvement from past reports where it was the worst). Only 34.1% of the students participating in the school lunch program also participated in the school breakfast program.

Nationally, for every 100 low-income children who ate free or reduced-price lunch, 47.2 low-income children ate free or reduced-price breakfast in school year 2009– 2010. In many of the best performing states, the ratio is about 60:100. A realistic goal for urban areas is 70%. Cities' large student populations allow them to benefit from economies of scale, and the concentration of free and reduced-price eligible students translates into larger federal reimbursements for the meals served.

Hunger Action Network is urging NYC to mandate participation in their breakfast in the homeroom pilot program, which has been very successful.
