



# Getting to the Root of the Problem GRASSROOTS

The Newsletter of the Hunger Action Network of New York State

September 2007

## Faces of Hunger Action Network

At our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in NYC on World Food Day, we are honoring three long-term anti-hunger leaders: **Kathy Goldman**, the founding director of Community Food Resource Center (now FoodChange); **Bill Ayres** of World Hunger Year, and NYC Public Advocate **Betsy Gotbaum**.

**Kathy Goldman** is a long-time community activist who has helped initiate innovative food programs such as school breakfast and summer meals in NYC since the 1960s. In 1980, she founded the Community Food Resource Center (CFRC) to focus attention on the issue of hunger and expand access to nutritious, affordable food for all.



Under Kathy's leadership, CFRC was an effective advocate, a source of reli-

continued on p. 11

## Assembly Holds Hearings on Welfare Grant Hike After 18 Years

The Assembly Social Services Committee held public hearings on the need to raise the welfare grant in New York City and Westchester in the first week of September. Additional hearings will be held this fall in Troy and Syracuse.

The basic welfare grant has not been increased since 1990 and has fallen to less than 50% of the federal poverty level. Over the last 18 years a generation of children have grown up while welfare benefits have declined in value every year.

Hunger Action is part of the Empire State Economic Security Campaign (ES2). ES2 recommends:

- N Y should immediately increase the Basic Allowance of the Public Assistance grant by 49% from \$291 to \$435 for a family of three to reflect the increase in the cost of living since the last adjustment in 1990.

- Fuel for Heating, Home Energy Allowance and the Supplemental Home Energy Allowances should be increased to

account for inflationary increases since the last adjustments in 1986/1987.

- A commission should be established to investigate the adequacy of all public assistance allowances and to recommend mechanisms to provide for annual cost adjustments. At a minimum, welfare benefits should at least raise families to the poverty line.

The other part of the welfare grant, the shelter allowance, has not been increased by lawmakers since 1988. The the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance did make a slight adjustment two years ago for families with children since the state's courts have ruled five times that rent payments for welfare participants are illegally low. The increase was so small that the litigation continues.

A number of Hunger Action Board members testified at the hearings, including Heidi Siegfried, Dennis Hanratty and Ed Fowler, as well as HANNYS's Executive and Associate Director. "While OTDA and local agencies have developed a lot of programs to help people assess their needs in finding sustainable

continued on p. 10

### In This Issue of Grassroots...

West Harlem CSA	3
Faith & the Farm Bill	4
Universal Health Care	5
Hamilton Hill Food Processors	7
Hudson Valley Food Stamps	7
Farm Aid	8
25th Anniversary	12

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## Notes from the Executive Director..

Dear Hunger Action Supporters:

Hunger Action Network is observing our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. I am celebrating my 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary working for the organization. As I look back on the work that we have accomplished over the years, one strong factor has been the support that we have received from our coalition partners – our friends fighting alongside us in our efforts. We have been fortunate to have been able to work with such wonderful groups and individuals.

In fact, the vast majority of our work is accomplished through coalitions, including our recent successes such as the \$200,000 in state funding to study health care options (thanks to Rekindling Reform and the other groups in the NY Universal Healthcare Options Coalition!), the enactment of the NYS Food Policy Council (thanks to the statewide community food security advocates participating in this effort!), the Assembly's proposal and hearings to raise the Public Assistance grant (thank you to the Economic Security Campaign's Coordinating Committee and sign-on organizations!) and the increased funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) (fighting for this were the regional food banks and other statewide anti-hunger groups).

These are just to name only a few of the coalition partners that we have worked with in our 25 year history. Of course we have also had the support of citizen advocates and policy makers.

We are honoring several of the leaders of our partner groups with our "Salute to Anti-Hunger Leaders" award – Bill Ayres and Kathy Goldman – advocates who have devoted their lives to ensuring food and economic justice for every person. Their organizations have over the years shared resources, led the charge against attacks on the hungry, worked diligently to improve food access for hungry New Yorkers and provided the strength in coalition that we needed. Policy makers such as NYC Comptroller Betsy Gotbaum (and State Senator Liz Krueger – a prior award recipient) have put the weight of their offices behind initiatives to improve government programs and policies.

Of course there will be times when groups may differ on strategies or project goals but overall Hunger Action has always been and will continue to be an organization that values working together, across geographic, issue area and other divides to make sure that the full force of all our combined efforts are used to eliminate hunger and poverty in our midst. You are likely one of our coalition partners since you have received this newsletter – so we THANK YOU for your tireless efforts and support!

We look forward to moving forward to more successes over the years and to meet new friends and build bigger and stronger coalitions!

Sincerely,

Bich Ha Pham, Esq  
Executive Director



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

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## West Harlem CSA

### HANNYS Project Increasing Access to Delicious Farm Fresh Food

It is sometimes difficult to find fresh produce at your local grocery store. Whatever is available was harvested weeks beforehand, usually trucked in from hundreds of miles away, making it not so “fresh”. Low-income neighborhoods have fewer supermarkets and bodegas.

The most inexpensive and accessible food in these areas is unhealthy, full of sugar, fat, and artificial ingredients, and is inextricably linked to the statistically higher obesity rates that plague low-income neighborhoods. When money is tight, paying a few dollars for McDonald’s will satisfy your stomach more than the limited amounts of healthy produce the same few dollars will buy.

Hunger Action and many partners are increasing access to delicious farm fresh food in the West Harlem area of NYC with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA is a way of purchasing a wide variety of fresh, seasonal produce directly from a farmer, cutting out the middle steps of distribution and retail.

In a typical CSA, a family “joins” a CSA farm for a full growing season for a set fee. The family receives a variety of seasonal vegetables every week—whatever food the farmer harvests divided equally among the CSA members.

The West Harlem CSA links a farmer in the Hudson Valley with emergency food programs (EFPs) and low-income families and individuals in West Harlem. This link comes in two forms: first, by distributing farm fresh food for free through the meals provided at several EFPs operating in West Harlem; and second, by starting a family style CSA so that residents of West Harlem can purchase whole-some affordable shares of food from a

local farmer. EFP and CSA members pick up the shares once a week throughout the June to Nov. harvest season.



This CSA targets lower-income families and enables them to use Food Stamps and other payment options that are feasible for them and still fair for our farmer. The project has a revolving loan fund so that we can pay the farmer upfront for lower-income members’ shares, guaranteeing a source of economic security for our farmer. Members can pay back into the loan fund every two weeks throughout the CSA season in smaller, incremental payments. At the end of the season, the loan fund will be replenished.

The health benefits of eating fresh vegetables is enormous – since they are jam-packed with essential vitamins, they keep the body energized, help the body maintain a healthy weight, and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer – the top three leading causes of death in the U.S. They also help reduce the risk of urinary tract infection, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, cataracts, etc.

In recent weeks, the CSA has been receiving an abundance of tasty vegetables from Cascade Farm, including summer squash, tomatoes, basil, cucumbers, potatoes, varieties of peppers, swiss chard, radishes, garlic, and more! The CSA isn’t just about food though – it’s about meeting neighbors and building a community.

For more info, contact Hunger Action Network, 212-741-8192 Ext 4#, or Just Food ([www.justfood.org](http://www.justfood.org)). We will work with our partner organizations (Just Food, NYCCA, United Way) to start a CSA in Brooklyn or Queens in 2008..

## Board of Directors

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# Faith Leaders Urge Farm Bill Reforms

Early this summer the House passed their version of the Farm Bill. While the bill contained some important reforms, including slightly higher funding for food stamps, a proposal backed by many faith groups and anti-hunger activists to overhaul the outdated commodity price support system failed.

“Political expediency trumped moral responsibility in the House’s vote on the farm bill,” said Bread for the World President David Beckmann. “In the end, the House made only cosmetic changes to the outdated commodity payment system.

Once Congress returns to Washington after Labor Day, the Senate will take up the farm bill.

Below is a text of a letter than many faith leaders have circulated to Congress on the Farm Bill.

Current U.S. farm policy represents a broken promise to America’s farmers and rural communities, and a severe distortion of our nation’s fundamental values of fairness and opportunity for all people. The vision behind the first U.S. farm bill in the 1930s – an economic safety net for farmers during difficult times – is barely recognizable in today’s farm bill.

Commodity subsidies flow to a small number of primarily large-scale farms while the majority of farm families and rural communities are left behind. In addition, U.S. commodity payments exert downward pressure on existing low crop prices, harming not only small and moderate size farmers at home, but paralyzing poor farmers in developing countries who simply cannot gain a foothold in agricultural markets distorted by the



current U.S. commodity payment system.

The status quo must not be allowed to prevail in the 2007 farm bill debate. The work of the Agriculture Committee thus far has failed to yield any meaningful hope for reform. In a time of fiscal constraints, we feel that existing farm bill resources offer an initial source of funds that should be more prudently distributed to farmers, rural communities and people who are hungry and living in poverty. We commit ourselves to supporting a new set of priorities for U.S. farm policy. The time has come for Congress to reclaim the values and the vision behind the original farm bill.

Specifically, the 2007 farm bill should:

Reform the commodity program to significantly reduce payments that distort prices and supply in ways that violate U.S. commitments and make it harder for farmers in poor countries to feed their families;

Reform U.S. farm policy to be more equitable, reducing payments to those

who need them least and strengthening help to those who need them most, particularly socially disadvantaged farmers;

Strengthen the food stamp program by increasing the level of benefits to reflect current costs of living; removing administrative barriers that keep poor and hungry people from accessing food stamps; and investing in programs that reach out to seniors, the sick, disabled and vulnerable families;

Increase investment in rural development targeting communities with the greatest need, create new programs that assist rural entrepreneurs and promote small business development;

Expand funding and access to conservation programs, in particular the Conservation Security Program for working farms which has effectively been eliminated in the Committee’s current legislative draft; and

Strengthen and increase international food aid in ways that encourage local food security and ensure that the first Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger by one half is achieved by 2015.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us of God’s description of a wise ruler: “He gave the poor a fair trial, and all went well with him.” (Jeremiah 22:16) Our nation’s current farm policy is a fair trial for no one, least of all people living in poverty and those in need. To a greater or lesser degree, our farm bill touches all Americans. It also reaches beyond our borders to some of the least among our brothers and sisters. We urge Members of Congress to seek broad reform in the next farm bill and we urge you, Madam Speaker, to be a leader of such reform.

## NYers Say it is Time for Universal Health Care

A statewide coalition of consumers, faith groups and medical professionals rallied in support of quality, affordable health care for all at the first state public hearing on universal health care in Glens Falls on September 5.

The state is holding a series of five public hearings through early December to get public input on how New York should create a universal health care system. The state early next year will conduct a series of studies on various approaches to providing health care to all New Yorkers. Governor Spitzer is expected to make a recommendation on universal health care in May 2008.

The NY Universal Health Care Options Campaign wants to ensure that every NYer has the right to receive quality health care while the state takes steps to control costs for consumers, taxpayers and employers. They are concerned that high copays or deductibles, or mandates for individuals to purchase health care insurance (e.g., the Massachusetts model) will still prevent many NYers from accessing health care services.

“We need our elected officials to put the interests of patients and consumers first. The other industrial countries spend far less money that we do yet they have better health outcomes and everyone is covered,” noted Mark Dunlea of the Hunger Action Network.

Public opinion polls have consistently shown strong public support for a universal health care system. For instance, a March 2007 poll by CBS/ NY Times found that 64 percent of the respondents said the government should guarantee health insurance for all. An overwhelming majority in the poll said the health care system needed fundamental change or total reorganization.

The American Cancer Society recently announced that it plans to devote its entire \$15 million advertising budget this year not to smoking or colorectal screening but to the problems of inadequate health coverage. A recent study by ACS found that people without health insurance and those on Medicaid are more likely to be diagnosed with advanced stages of cancer than those with private health insurance.

Many of the groups are concerned about the role of private health insurance, and the significant administrative costs and bureaucracy it imposes on the health care system.

“Health care costs will never be controlled as long as private insurance companies are allowed to use our premiums to fund their efforts to compete for market share and to devise strategies to increase profits by reducing claims paid out. A single-payer system of publicly financed, privately-delivered health care is the only way to control cost in a meaningful, sustainable way,” said Colleen M. Florio, PhD, Chair, Warren County League of Women Voters.

While the coalition looks forward to see how the state’s funded studies evaluate the different approaches to universal health care, many individual groups presently prefer a single-payer model such as Medicare for All.

Paul Winkeller, the Executive Director of the local Physicians for a National Health Program, which represents 14,000 physicians nationally, said his group strongly supports a single payer system.

“This approach, in varying forms, is now in place in every other major highly industrialized western nation. Because the profit incentive that dominates the largely private multi-payer system in the

US has been stripped out, these countries pay far less per capita for comprehensive care for every one of their citizens, and because of these savings and efficiencies key industries in many of these nations have a distinct advantage in the highly competitive global marketplace,” said Winkeller.

“If any state in the nation can win a single payer guaranteed healthcare plan for all, it is NY” said Marilyn Clement, National Coordinator, Healthcare-NOW. Added Rebecca Elgie of the Tompkins County Health Care Task Force, “we need to stay focused on ending for-profit health care.”

A local business owner commented, “NY businesses and our workers are forced to subsidize the health care costs of corporate welfare recipients like WalMart. In the meantime, because we don’t pay our workers starvation wages, they are considered ‘too wealthy’ to receive these state-run benefits. A single-payer system will level the playing field for all New Yorkers and provide a real answer to the most serious issue facing business today,” said Matt Funicello of Rock Hill Bakehouse, Inc.

### List of future hearings

Wed. Oct. 3, Erie County Community College, Buffalo

Tues. Oct. 30, Fordham University, 113 West 60th Street, NYC

Tues. Nov. 13 Onondaga Community College, Syracuse

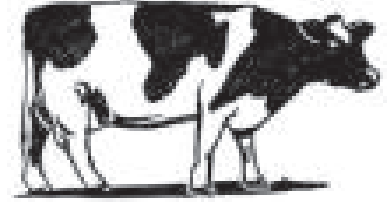
Mon. Nov. 26 Monroe Community College Rochester

Wed. Dec. 5: SUNY Old Westbury (all from 10 AM to 5 PM)

Wed. Oct. 10, 3 – 7 p.m, Call-in Hearing

# Hunger Action Network

# Green Space



## Feeding Kids in the summer

In the 1970's, the federal government started the Summer Food Service program (SFSP). The SFSP provides free nutritious meals to children eighteen and younger, during the summer months, while school is out.

This summer, Hunger Action Network worked in Queens and elsewhere both to increase the number of sites participating as well as the number of children being fed. Hunger Action did a massive outreach campaign in District 30 which covers the areas of Jackson Heights, Astoria, and Long Island City.

66% of children enrolled in District 30 schools are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals and could benefit from summer meals. However, in 2005, only 13% of eligible children participated in the summer meals program

Summer meals are typically served by schools, camps, food programs, housing authorities, and other community groups who agree to be the local SFSP sponsor or site. Sponsors are reimbursed from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To become a site, there are only two basic requirements. First, you must have a place where the kids can eat. Second, the person serving the food must be licensed by the health department.

Hunger Action Network helped increase the number of sites in the area. We were able to get sites at locations, which were

never considered before, i.e. libraries and Astoria playground. Also, we were able to get sites at churches, daycare centers, and housing developments.

During the outreach campaign, Hunger Action Network built a strong broad base coalition of community workers, leaders, and politicians with the goal of

building our efforts in the community for years to come.

We made a number of site visits to talk to workers, parents, and children to hear first hand about the positive and negative aspects of the summer food program. Contact Francisco in our NYC office for more info.

## My Food Stamp Experience

In Dec 2006, I decided to apply for Food Stamps. Via the internet, I tried to find info on what documentation I needed. This was very difficult. After several hours, I called a food stamp office. While the case worker told me what documents I needed, she spoke very fast and then would not repeat the list. I had to call back the next day to get the list.

Since I work and did not want to make multiple trips, I waited until I had all my pay stubs. In early January, I made my first trip to HRA (food stamp office). I was told to fill out an application and wait. I waited for 4 hours and was then given a date to come back in two weeks. I was not screened for expedited Food Stamps.

On Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, I returned to HRA in Brooklyn. Even though I arrived 30 minutes early for my 11 AM interview, I waited until 4pm. At this time there were still 75 people ahead of me, and I needed to go to work. When I asked for a new interview date, the receptionist scheduled it for February 8<sup>th</sup>, a work day for me.

She suggested that I take the day off, which I did.

Arriving back at HRA 30 minutes early, at 9am. I waited until 5pm. The room was packed with people. Many were forced to stand (including elderly and children). People missed their numbers being called because they had to stand in the hallway or went to the bathroom, which meant you had to come back another day. The numbers called went out of order. Many people left in frustration.

At 5pm, I was called. I then waited in a room for a half hour. The caseworker asked about my background, why had I moved to NYC if I couldn't afford it, why couldn't a young person find a better paying job. Next door, a man who did not speak English was told they could not find a translator; he would have to stumble through or return at a later date. I received Food Stamp benefits on Feb. 20. It took 3 months & 19 hours of my time. (Veda now works for HANNYS helping others get food stamps))

## Hamilton Hill Food Processors

The Hamilton Hill Food Processors is a venture of Hunger Action into the world of commercial food processing. Located in Schenectady, the project has three main goals: to provide low-income residents on-the-job training through living wage jobs; to provide a link to local farmers; and to supply low cost healthy foods and snacks to the residents.

The project will purchase locally grown produce from NY farmers throughout the growing season. The project will initially produce healthy bread spreads and gourmet jams. An expanded product line will follow soon after, featuring season items, sauces, dips, and salsas. These goods will then be used to create our delicious spreads and jams.

The project will provide its products at a reduced rate for the residents. Additionally a new product line made of local ethnic dishes featuring collard green and olive pesto is being developed.

Hunger Action decided to first produce bread spreads and jams because of its partnership with the Rock Hill Bakehouse. The bread spreads and jams are to be sold at gourmet food stores, specialty food stores, food co-ops, farmers markets and supermarkets.

The product line will consist of 3 bread spreads; Tomato Bruschetta, Roasted Red Pepper Bruschetta, and Roasted Italian Veggie. 2 gourmet jams will also

be available; Raspberry Chardonnay and Blackberry Merlot.

This project is very exciting for us; Hamilton Hill Food Processors will be one of the first companies to produce a fruit and wine jam which will be available in ordinary stores. It also using local produce from farmers using sustainable growing methods. The bread spreads have been developed to have a less vinegary taste as compared to products currently available in stores.

Area residents should see Hamilton Hill Food Processors' delicious products on your shelves by January. Keep an eye out also at Farmers' Markets across NY.

## Food Stamps in the Hudson Valley

Hunger Action's outreach project, *Food Stamps Make New York Stronger* is aimed at improving access to Food Stamps in the Hudson Valley region, which has some of the lowest participation rates in NYS. The project is working to increase Food Stamp participation, reduce stigma, and increase knowledge and access to Food Stamps and Food Stamp resources.

The Food Stamp Program is a federal nutrition program which provides a monthly benefit to enable people with low-incomes to purchase groceries.

Food Stamps are provided on an Electronic Benefit Transfer Card, similar to a credit card. Food Stamps are a vital resource to low-income New Yorkers, providing recipients access to high quality and nutritious groceries. The average household benefit is 209 dollars a month, which can enable low income New Yorkers to meet their family's nutritional needs.

In NYS, only about half of those eligible receive Food Stamp benefits. In fact, NYS ranks about 43 of all states in Food Stamp participation.

Hunger Action Network has initiated a toll-free hotline, in which we can determine eligibility and approximate benefit levels and also provides application assistance and referrals to the Food Stamp office. We also conduct on-site Food Stamp pre-screenings at emergency food programs, libraries, grocery stores, farmers markets, and other community events.

While emergency food programs play essential role providing immediate food assistance, it is important that community organizations join us in promoting the Food Stamp Program to encourage long term food security.

NYS announced an initiative to help more working families get food stamps (though some of the changes need a

federal waiver). Families with an adult working 30 hours per week, or households with two adults who each work at least 20 hours per week would be offered a simplified application process.

Eligible applicants will bypass the face-to-face interview at social services offices, will not be subject to finger imaging, and will face less demanding reporting requirements. Resource limits will be waived for all food stamp recipients in New York State, allowing them to save for important family needs without jeopardizing their food stamp benefits.

If you have questions or would like to request more information, please contact Veda Myers at 212-741-8192 ex. 2# or [vmyers@hungeractionnys.org](mailto:vmyers@hungeractionnys.org).

Hunger Action would like to graciously acknowledge On Press Graphics Inc for donating their copying services.

## Hunger Action Joins Farm Aid in NYC

For the first time, Farm Aid's annual concert was held in NYC on Sept. 9th. Hunger Action joined with Farm Aid in events in NYC and Albany to draw attention to the need for stronger sustainable agriculture policies.

Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Mellencamp organized the first Farm Aid concert in 1985 to raise awareness about the loss of family farms and to raise funds to keep farm families on their land. Since 1985, Farm Aid has raised more than \$30 million.

Bich Ha Pham, HANNYS' Executive Director, spoke at the The New York Food Policy Forum: Fresh Ideas on Farms and Food forum. Organized by Farm Aid, The New School and Food

Systems Network NYC, the forum identified strategies for strengthening family farm agriculture, advancing food security and helping connect more people with family-farm identified foods.

The forum examined possibilities for securing more urban land for farming, while building viable urban-grown food enterprises; assuring the long-term security and growth of farmers' markets in New York City; supporting farmers in their efforts to grow food in a manner that protects the environment; keeping more New York land in farming; increasing neighborhood food security and connections to regionally-produced food through retail outlets; and improving nutrition assistance programs provided at the city, State and national levels.



Farm Aid's goal is to bring together family farmers, citizens and consumers to build thriving, family farm-centered agriculture. To that end, Farm Aid works in the following four categories:

- Growing the Good Food Movement;
- Taking Action to Change the System;
- Helping Farmers Thrive;
- Promoting Food From Family Farms.:

## Feds Block NY Child Health Expansion

On Sept. 7, the Bush administration (i.e., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)) denied NYS's waiver application to allow the state to increase the income eligibility level for the Child Health Plus (CHP) program to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level.

At the same time, Congress must reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) before it expires at the end of September. The House and the Senate have approved different bills that must be reconciled before they are sent to the President. Both bills contain substantially more money than the President has requested.

SCHIP gives states matching federal funds to provide health coverage to children in families whose income is modestly above Medicaid limits. States can use SCHIP funds to create or expand a separate health insurance program for children and/or to provide coverage to

additional children within their Medicaid program. SCHIP will expire at the end of fiscal year 2007 if Congress does not reauthorize it by the end of September.

New York chose to use its SCHIP funds to create Child Health Plus. CHP is a separate, stand alone program for children distinct from Medicaid. Nearly 400,000 children are enrolled in CHP and about 1.8 million children were enrolled in NY's Medicaid program.

CHP offers a comprehensive benefits package that is similar to Medicaid. It covers all inpatient and outpatient services, prescription drugs, dental and vision care, and mental health and substance abuse. CHPlus covers children under 19 and not Medicaid eligible.

**NY Children's Action Network** recently wrote to our state congressional delegation urging them to push the Bush administration to approve NY's waiver.

Several issues are particularly important. Eligibility must reflect NY's unique cost of living status. And a realistic standard for enrollment must be employed. No state has achieved the new CMS threshold of 95% enrollment of children under 200% of poverty; yet this would become a requirement before a program expansion would be granted.

NY must be able to develop our own crowd-out standards. SCHIP has allowed states to develop their own standards to prevent and measure crowd-out (the supplanting of private insurance with public insurance). However, CMS is now imposing restrictions that will disadvantage children and be onerous to state regulators. For example, CMS would impose a requirement that all children be uninsured for one year before enrollment. No child should have to go without insurance for an entire year just to satisfy CMS' "arbitrary perception."

# Spitzer Vetoes Welfare Reform but Creates Economic Security Cabinet

Anti-poverty advocates reacted with dismay when Governor Spitzer vetoed legislation to strengthen the state's welfare to work programs by putting more of an emphasis on helping participants find jobs and escape poverty.

A few days later however the Governor won applause by establishing an Economic Security Cabinet to strengthen state efforts to help the working poor. Hunger Action however wants him to go further in addressing the pervasive problem of poverty, especially in upstate inner cities. One key issue of course is to finally raise the welfare grant.

The groups said the veto showed that the Governor was getting poor advice from state welfare officials. Federal data shows that New York has one of the weakest welfare to work programs in the country, ranking only 47th in overall effectiveness

"In his 2007 State of the State address, Governor Spitzer said, 'One New York means a state that does not just help a working parent off the welfare roll, but one that helps lift him out of poverty,'" stated Jillynn Stevens of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies.

The bill would have required counties to pay more attention to jobs in their community that pay above poverty level wages, including nontraditional employment opportunities for women such as in construction and computer fields. It would have also required the counties to mention such jobs when discussing with welfare participants what employment opportunities they could pursue.

As Rachel Morgenstern, a student with Welfare Reform Initiative in NYC points

out, "the argument that Mayor Bloomberg and others made - that people have to take any job because they have to start somewhere and can move on from there - rings hollow. I have worked at Staples and other low wage jobs. They seldom promote workers from inside and if they do, they still make less."

"The New York State Catholic Conference has a profound respect to the dignity for each individual," said staff member Earl Eichelberger. "This demands that we support programs that will allow individuals to grow and develop; earning a living that allow for self sufficiency. Education and training for skilled jobs may be their best path out of poverty."

The Governor stated that he was worried that having more welfare participants in vocational training would cause problems with the federal welfare work rules. The reality is the exact opposite. Even though up to 30% of the caseload can be in vocational programs, only 16% in New York currently are. Thus it would have helped us meet the federal work requirements if New York added another 10,000 people to these allowable training slots.

"New York State and the local districts have failed to follow through on the existing legal requirements to help welfare participants become employable. They claim they want to place participants in jobs before they give them education and training, but then the local districts don't have programs to provide such assistance once they find jobs. Contrary to existing federal and state law, New York City and the counties fail to adequately assess the barriers people face in obtaining employment, nor are they working

with participants to help them develop a real plan to get the training, education and work experience they need to overcome those barriers. The poor people of the state need to see a Governor who is willing to stand up for their legal rights so they can find employment and escape poverty," added Mark Dunlea, of HANNYS.

While welfare to work has reduced the number of people participating in welfare, it has failed to reduce poverty. Poverty in many upstate cities has reached epidemic levels.

A recent report by Community Voices Heard showed that that 1/3 of people in New York City's work first program had to come back to welfare. Another 1/3 we don't know what happened to them (not in their job but not back on welfare). And the 1/3 who were still employed were making poverty wages.

"Vocational training programs that emphasize placement in good paying jobs, such as in Oregon, have led to jobs paying over \$5,000/year more than their typical work first jobs. That's a huge income difference for these families. That's a smart investment," said Bich Ha Pham, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network.

In his veto message, Gov. Spitzer stated that he has instructed OTDA Commissioner David Hansell to work with all LSSDs to develop other avenues for increasing district use of job skills training, including establishing district plans for increasing the number of public assistance recipients placed in all federally-allowable education and vocational skills training.

## Welfare Grant...from 1

employment, the agencies themselves admit that the assessment process can take years to complete. What are people supposed to do in the meantime? It is unfair and dehumanizing to force people to live at 50% of the already-too-low poverty level," said Ed Fowler of Neighbors Together.

The Assembly proposed a 10% increase in the basic grant in this year's budget but it was opposed by the Senate Republicans. The Senate Democrats recently proposed a 25% increase in the basic grant.

The realities of the state budget process means the Governor has to include any increase in his budget proposal. With Governor Spitzer intending to draft his budget for 2008-09 earlier than usual (e.g., Thanksgiving), anti-poverty advocates must convince him this fall to support an increase. Letters of support should be sent to **Governor Spitzer, State Capitol, Albany NY 12224.**

NY continues to have the highest poverty rate of all of the northeastern and midwestern states. For 2005-06, NY's poverty rate was 14.3 percent—well above the national average of 12.5 percent. It is likely not a coincidence that the last time New York's poverty rate did not exceed the U.S. rate was in 1990, when the welfare grant in New York State was last increased.

The recently released data for "large cities" showed extraordinarily high poverty rates (26.5% to 31.3%) for upstate NY cities. Poverty rates for children were even higher: Syracuse 40.2 percent, Rochester 40.9 percent, Albany 41.6 percent and Buffalo 42.6 percent.

The purchasing power of the welfare grant has declined sharply. The rate of inflation from 1990 to 2006 is 55% —

### The Rise in Costs Over 16 Years

	1990	2006	%Increase
<b>Foods</b>			
Milk (Skim, half gallon carton)	\$.68	\$1.32	94
Eggs (Large white, 1 dozen)	\$.48	\$.89	85
Tomatoes (Roma, per lb)	\$.39	\$.99	154
Tuna Fish (Empress Light oz can)	\$.58	\$.75	29
Ground Beef (73-80% lean, per lb)	\$.99	\$2.59	161
Pasta Sauce (Ragu, 30 oz)	\$1.49	\$1.79	20
Butter (1lb package)	\$.99	\$2.19	121
<b>Over the Counter Medicines and Toiletries</b>			
Toothpaste (Close-up, 6.4 oz tube)	\$1.77	\$2.99	68
Shampoo (Johnson's Baby, 20oz)	\$2.99	\$4.49	50
<b>Household cleaners, paper products and other items</b>			
Laundry Detergent (Cheer liquid, 1.2gal)	\$3.49	\$5.99	71
Toilet Paper (Charmin, 4 roll)	\$1.37	\$3.19	133
Batteries (2 Energizer C or D)	\$1.99	\$3.99	101

and the cost of many items has risen above that. The cost of milk rose 94%, green peppers by 190%, toothpaste by 68% and laundry detergent by 71%.

In addition, the price of fuel oil and natural gas prices have on average more than doubled since the fuel for heating allowance was adjusted in 1987.

Since the last grant increase in 1990, there has been a major transformation of the state's welfare system. Those now on welfare are the working poor, the disabled and children. Able-bodied individuals on welfare are required to participate in various work-related activities. They are all struggling trying to live on an average of \$9.50 (for a family of 3) — that's \$3 a day per person to pay for travel, clothing, school supplies, toilet paper, etc.

Comparing the HUD Fair Market Value for rent to the shelter allowance statewide, there was an average \$317 disparity between the allowance and the fair market rent. This gap is more than the

maximum cash grant for a family of three. PA households usually have to spend part or even all of their basic grant to supplement the shelter allowance, leaving little to no funds for other basic necessities.

In Monroe County a family of three with children heating with gas has a shelter allowance of \$397 per month, while the HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$687. In NYC, a family of three with children has a shelter allowance of \$400 per month, while the HUD fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1075.

Despite the 61% decline in the public assistance rolls since 1998, there are more than 535,000 New Yorkers including more than 300,000 children, on PA. One alarming statistic compiled by SCAA is that the share of poor children on public assistance has dropped from 69% of eligible children in 1993 to 36% in 2005, meaning that almost two thirds of all poor children are not receiving public assistance.

## Faces „from 1

able data and an incubator for important pilot programs. In 1983, it helped create Food for Survival, one of the largest food banks in the United States. The next year, it set up the Community Kitchen of West Harlem, which serves 500 dinners each weekday evening and, with the assistance of neighborhood teenagers, delivers meals to homebound elderly persons in the area.

CFRC has initiated other programs such as senior dinners at public schools and school nutrition committees, which work with parents and school personnel. CFRC also helped families retain their apartments and access food stamps and other supports.

**Bill Ayres** is Executive Director and co-founder of World Hunger Year (WHY). Ayres became a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese in New York in 1966, but always had a fondness for radio broadcasting. He began hosting and producing a weekly radio talk show on NY Radio WPLJ 95.5FM in 1973, on which has taken thousands of calls and offered advice about personal, relational, spiritual and social values.



In 1975, Ayres and his close friend, folksinger and songwriter Harry Chapin, saw a pressing need to aid the impoverished with basic needs such as food. They began World Hunger Year, an organization with a stated mission to defeat hunger through charity, using grassroots efforts and rallying celebrities and leaders to help promote the cause.

Ayres has served as Executive Director since 1983. Ayres and Chapin believed that solutions to hunger and poverty are found through long-term solutions, like supporting community-based organizations that empower individuals and build self-reliance. Ayres has spun off other two national hunger coalitions, The Medford Group of national hunger organizations and the National Jobs for All Coalition. He is also a board member of Long Island Cares, Long Island's food bank.

Over the past three decades, Public Advocate **Betsy Gotbaum** has led a distinguished career in the public and private sectors. Betsy has worked as advisor to three mayors; financial executive developing capital for start-up entrepreneurial firms; commissioner of the Department of Parks & Recreation; and president of the prestigious New-York Historical Society. In all her jobs, Betsy has been known for using nontraditional methods to turn troubled institutions into success stories.



Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said, "I congratulate the Hunger Action Network on 25 years of outstanding service to New York and I am honored to be selected as an Anti-Hunger Leader. I share in the goal of ending hunger for New Yorkers and will continue my work towards this end with ongoing efforts to raise the Public Assistance grant and working to improve access to food stamps. Hunger affects too many individuals everyday, and with organizations like Hunger Action Network taking the lead, we will continue to work to improve the lives of New Yorkers in need."

Since Betsy's inauguration as Public Advocate in January 2002, her leadership has paved the way for municipal reform in education, school construction, prevention of crime against women, and the fight against hunger.

In her first term as Public Advocate, Ms. Gotbaum helped tens of thousands of families, seniors, and children solve their problems with City government. On taking office, she pledged to focus on five main policy areas—hunger, housing, child welfare, education, and women's issues—and, over the course of her first four years in office, made important strides in each.

Betsy exposed major problems in the special education system, prompting the Dept. of Education to set aside more money for special needs students. She successfully lobbied to stop the administration from cutting preventive services that help families keep their children out of foster care.

Her recommendations led to reforms in the food stamp application process that have helped thousands of NYC families put food on their tables. She has launched studies that shed light on the City's affordable housing crisis and the provision of government services to survivors of domestic violence.

Throughout her career, Betsy has shown commitment to community service. She has served on the boards of innumerable not-for-profit organizations, including the Community Service Society; The Valley Recreation and Youth Development Program in Harlem; Goodwill Industries; and the Municipal Arts Society.

She is married to labor leader Victor Gotbaum and has one daughter, three grandchildren, four stepchildren, and eight stepgrandchildren.

# 25th Anniversary Event NYC Oct. 16

Hunger Action Network's 25th anniversary event will take place on World Food Day at the 1199 Auditorium located at 310 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street New York, NY 10036 from 5:30-8:00 pm. The event will feature light refreshments and beer and wine. For a ticket or more info, call 212 741-8192, xt. 0#.

The event will honor three longtime anti-hunger leaders for their work: Kathy Goldman, founding director of Community Food Resource Center (now Food Change) and the Food for Survival food bank; Bill Ayres, co-founder of World Hunger Year; and NYC Public Advo-

cate Betsy Gotbaum. (See FACES on the first page for more information).

We wish of course that there was no need for a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary – that hunger had in fact been eliminated in the world's richest country. Unfortunately, the lines at the food pantries and soup kitchens continue to grow.

Hunger Action has always taken a dual approach to its work. One, it tries to increase the amount of food provided today to hungry New Yorkers. This has included increasing state funding for emergency food (now up to \$28 million a year); urging backyard gardeners to

Grow an Extra Row to donate to an area food pantry; and, promoting community food security through programs such as Community Supported Agriculture and community gardens.

We have also focused on long term solutions to hunger, such as increasing the minimum wage; expanding access to education and job training; universal health care; affordable housing; and creation of living way jobs.

For our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary we have established a special fund to support our work in the areas on universal health care and community food policy.

## HUNGER ACTION NETWORK OF NEW YORK STATE MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION COUPON

- Yes, I want to help end the root causes of hunger by becoming a member:
- \$30 Individual     \$5(low/fixed income)     \$35small organization  
 \$60 mediumorganization     \$120 large organization
- Here is my donation of \_\_\_\_\_ in support of the Winter Appeal.
- Please send me information about volunteer opportunities

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve.) \_\_\_\_\_ (FAX) \_\_\_\_\_ (E-Mail) \_\_\_\_\_  
Credit care info:  MC  VISA Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date. \_\_\_\_\_  
signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to and return to Hunger Action Network of NYS, 260 W. 36th St., #504, NY NY 10018

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