

Hunger Action Network of NYS
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Media Release

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Hunger Action Opposes Congressional Attacks on Hungry Americans

The Hunger Action Network of NYS criticized the leadership of the House of Representatives for their efforts to slash funding for a variety of anti-hunger programs at a time when domestic hunger is at record levels. The House will vote today to adopt the so-called Ryan budget proposals.

"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. 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," noted Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network.

The recent 2011 federal budget compromise 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.

In 2010, under Democratic leadership, Congress 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 soon shut down once Congress realized what they had done by slashing funding for programs such as public housing. We were wrong. 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," stated Dunlea.

In 1980, the richest 1% of New Yorkers received 10% of the state's income. That figure has now increased to 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 poor and middle class don't have enough to spend and the wealthy have too much to spend. According to Nobel Prize

winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, providing tax cuts to the wealthy in this recession in an ineffective waste of tax dollars.

In January 2011, SNAP/Food Stamps participation rose to a record 44,187,831 people, and an increase of more than 4.7 million people compared with the prior January. One in seven Americans receives SNAP/Food Stamps. This is the highest share of the U.S. population on SNAP/Food Stamps.

A recent survey by Hart Research Associated, commissioned by FRAC and Tyson Foods, Inc. found that a vast majority (91 percent) of Americans are committed to the principle that no one should go hungry in the U.S. 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.

Hunger Action said that the People's Budget being advanced by the Congressional Progressive Caucus was 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.