

"DEAR COLLEAGUE" TO MEMBERS OF THE SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE

March 27, 1980

Dear :

In recent days, there has been a good deal of discussion concerning a possible budget savings proposal to eliminate the so-called "overlap" between food stamps and school lunch benefits. During consideration of the First Concurrent Budget Resolution, this kind of budget cutting proposal might arise, and it would be useful for you to be aware of its implications. The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry voted to reject a similar proposal in its recommendations to the Budget Committee. Instead, an alternate proposal was adopted in the form of a \$300 million unspecified budget cut (this was in addition to the \$300 million savings already incorporated in the Administration proposal).

The amendment to eliminate this "overlap" has surface appeal. In fact, on March 21, 1980, The New York Times editorialized as follows:

...It is nonetheless possible to act humanely while finding savings in anti-poverty spending. For example, food stamp recipients whose children also get free school lunches are receiving a double subsidy. Eliminating this duplication would save \$1 billion next year. ...

However, five days later, The New York Times, with the benefit of reflection, reversed its previous endorsement of this proposal in an article entitled "A Poor Way to Slice Food" (a copy of the complete editorial retraction is attached), which states:

...Although food stamp benefits do overlap with school lunch subsidies for millions of poor children, the programs together seem to fill critical nutritional needs of the young. Ending the duplication in one swoop would be an unfortunate way to balance the Federal budget; it could jeopardize the health of those who rely most on food stamps.

March 27, 1980
Page 2

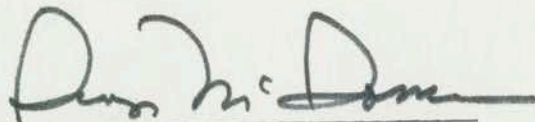
The New York Times is to be commended for having the courage to admit when they are wrong. We are pleased to see that this publication, which is one of the most highly regarded in the U.S., chose to admit its mistake.

Secretary of Agriculture Bergland captures the essence of our reservations concerning this proposal in his March 26, 1980, letter to the editor of The New York Times (complete copy attached):

....food stamp and school lunch benefits are not duplicate benefits. Food stamp benefits are based on the lowest-cost diet plan this department has ever devised. Studies have consistently found that few families spending at this level get a nutritionally adequate diet. Our National Food Consumption Survey found that only 10 percent of families spending on the level of this plan received all of the daily allowance of nutrients.

We urge you to be reluctant to accept proposals for reductions in the food stamp program or the child nutrition programs without careful consideration of the ramifications of those cuts on the future health costs of poor children and families. It is our firm belief that the money we spend on preventive medicine through improving the nutrition of susceptible segments of our population is money well spent. We urge you to reject this cut that may in fact result in increased federal health expenditures in the future.

Sincerely yours,



George McGovern
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Nutrition



Bob Dole
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Nutrition

CB:ew