

Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity: Foundations Ask Presidential Candidates What They'll Do for America

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What the Next President Could Do: End Child Hunger, by Joel Berg and Tom Freedman

Six ideas for an invigorated fight against child hunger.

Poverty can have devastating consequences: terrible living conditions, limitations on economic opportunity, but perhaps most viscerally: hunger. As food prices skyrocket and the economy tightens, the presence of hunger in our country is becoming simultaneously more challenging and apparent to all.

The existence of hunger in America is awful, but the fact that American children are going hungry is also an embarrassment. The numbers are startling: in 2006, over 15% of children lived below the poverty line, and 12.6 million children lived in households that were unable to always afford enough food. Of those, 430,000 children were particularly bad off, directly suffering from reduced food intake.

If we are to address hunger and poverty in America, we need to begin with our children. It is not only the right thing to do, but will also portend a better future for our country: fewer children in poverty will mean fewer high school drop-outs, less crime, and more people employed in a good job.

The question is: how could a future president tackle this problem? Here are six ideas to begin the fight:

First, new policies towards child hunger should include both more resources and real reform. This begins with accountability. Agencies that fight hunger in America need to be better organized and streamlined. One example is the Food Stamp program, which should be combined with other nutrition programs so as to make participation easier and less confusing. Another way to help agency efficiency is to make the US Secretary of Agriculture responsible for achieving concrete results in reducing domestic hunger, which would be a stimulus for real action.

In addition, we must expand participation in nutrition programs. For a variety of reasons, many families who are eligible for hunger programs do not apply, and this is very detrimental to the children living in those families. One solution for ensuring greater

participation is to make a standard application for many nutrition programs including WIC, Food Stamps, schools meals, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

School breakfasts are another way to ensure that children do not go hungry. School meal programs made available to all students during the school day have been shown to have dramatic success. Not only would ensuring a morning meal for every child help end hunger, it would improve their education, as research shows that children who go hungry have more trouble learning in school.

Another crucial policy that would help keep children from hunger is to support working families. This means real benefits from working in addition to a living wage. While Congress raised the minimum wage to be \$7.25 an hour by next July, it is not enough, and should be indexed to inflation. Additionally, the Earned Income Tax Credit should be expanded and reach more families.

One place where child hunger is being more addressed in interesting ways is in the states. The federal government should play a supportive role by rewarding states for success in hunger programs. For example, the USDA could give bonuses to the five states that had the greatest percent reduction in USDA measures of food insecurity and hunger. These states could then use their winnings to expand and improve their anti-hunger programs. This would act as an incentive for other states to create truly effective hunger policies.

Finally, the government must forge better partnerships with non-profits. This would result in higher quality of hunger programs and improved outreach. The relationship between non-profits and the government needs to be encouraged to flourish and expand – but it requires focus, new energy, and serious resources.

These six ideas are a starting point for how to begin a fight against poverty focusing on children. Americans are ready to come together and defeat a common challenge like child hunger. The problem is finding the political will to do it—Americans believe that child hunger should not be a reality in our great country. There's no need to wait.

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Viewpoints in this section solely represent the authors' opinions and not the opinions of "Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity."