

OPINION

Progress against Hunger and Obesity

Better access to healthy meals in schools

BY SUSAN CASTILLO

A good month for advocates of children's health and nutrition. In early December, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act – an improved child nutrition bill which represents the most significant investment in the National School Lunch program in more than 30 years.

Here in Oregon, and around the nation, we have been faced with the dual epidemics of child hunger and child obesity. This important legislation will work to tackle both of these critical issues by increasing access to healthy, nutritious meals in school

cafeterias and increasing the number of students eligible to enroll in school meal programs.

This legislation would not have been possible without the dedication and vision of advocates, educators, nutritionists, legislators, and community leaders from around the country. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all those who helped – both directly and behind the scenes – to get this bill passed. It will make a significant difference in the lives and health of our students.

We all know how important good nutrition is to healthy bodies and healthy minds. Students can't focus on learning if they are hungry or not receiving proper nutrition. This new legislation will help ensure our students are growing up healthy and hunger-free.

However, hunger is not only

an issue during the school year. Oregon has the second highest child hunger rate in the nation, and many families rely heavily on the meals students receive at school to supplement what is available at home.

Summer can be one of the worst times for families suffering from food insecurity. While summer food programs are offered throughout the state, some families find it hard to make it to a local food service location. This can be a particular challenge in rural areas.

In an effort to fight student hunger over the summer months, the USDA has issued demonstration grants to five states including Oregon. Oregon's grant, administered by the Oregon Department of Human Services, will provide low-income families in Linn and Jefferson counties with additional money for food this

summer. In these two counties, participating families with school-age children will receive a SNAP benefit card, similar to a debit card, which they can use in stores to buy food. The food benefit will be \$60 per child per month during the summer. This project is designed to help fight student hunger over the summer months by supplementing the family food budget. Participating students will still be eligible to take part in site-based summer food programs.

Both this grant and the nutrition legislation passed by congress will make a real and measurable difference for some of our most vulnerable kids and help ensure that they receive access to the nutritious meals they need – both in and out of school.

Susan Castillo is the Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction.



Health Care Law Breaks Racial Barriers

Aim is access to medical help when you need it

BY JUDGE MATHIS

Republicans, trying to make good on campaign promises, are working hard to repeal the 2010 healthcare law that, once fully implemented, will provide health insurance in some form for all Americans.

Those who supported the law realize that it's imperfect but recognize that the law's passage was an important first step. Over time, the law will save billions of dollars and ensure that Americans, regardless of income, can access medical help when they need it.

A new study shows us that money will be saved in other ways, too. A report released by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reveals shocking racial health disparities. Billions of dollars are spent each year treating illnesses in advanced stages. With healthcare more readily available, it is safe to assume that chronic conditions can be treated regularly and early, avoiding costly hospital stays and saving the larger public money in the long run.



It's never been a secret that race and income play a part in the quality of medical care an individual receives. But these numbers are shocking.

In a country as rich as America, the expectation should be that all children live through infancy and grow into healthy adults. However, children born to African-American women are three times more likely to die before they make it to their first year than those born to women of other races.

With healthcare more readily available, it is safe to assume that chronic conditions can be treated regularly and early, avoiding costly hospital stays and saving the larger public money in the long run.

If the child does make it to adulthood, they will be twice as likely to suffer from high blood pressure and much more likely to suffer from heart disease or have a stroke than their white counterparts. And, unfortunately, their chances of contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is shockingly higher than that of whites.

Granted, each of these illnesses are preventable. Personal responsibility – eating right, exercising, practicing safe sex – goes a long way in making sure an individual is not afflicted with these diseases. However,

if one does find themselves struggling with one of these illnesses, they should be able to access quality medical care early and often and not have to worry about costs.

If the diseases go untreated, the long-term effects go far beyond the individual: society ultimately pays. \$7 billion to be exact. That's how much is spent a year treating preventable diseases in this country. And African Americans have twice the rate of preventable hospitalizations than whites.

Before Republicans continue with their plan of repealing the healthcare law, with no workable proposal for a replacement, they should first think about what price the country will have to pay if they are successful.

The Republican Party should not only leave the current healthcare law intact, they should sit down with Democrats and strategize to improve it. One of those improvements should be funding more community clinics in urban areas – clinics that educate and counsel residents on disease prevention. The Republican Party needs to realize that honoring campaign promises is important but only if that promise is in the best interest of the entire nation.

Greg Mathis is a former Michigan District Court Judge and current syndicated television show judge.



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