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OPINION

Preventable Hunger in Our Land of Plenty

The battle for nutrition assistance

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The nearly 49 million Americans—including nearly 16 million children—living in food insecure households will



be struggling to afford the food they need this holiday season. These families won't be choosing between apple or pumpkin pie but will face choices about paying for groceries or rent, heat, electricity, medicine or clothing for their children as they do each month—choices no family should have to make in our nation with the largest Gross Domestic Product in the world.

Congress will be choosing how many of these desperate families and children in need to cut from life-giving and life-sustaining federal nutrition programs. In the middle of this season of gratitude for plenty, Congress has put the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP,

often called food stamps) on the chopping block while leaving largely intact subsidies for rich farmers and even some non-farmers.

With the decision deadline just weeks away Congress is working to bridge the gap between two dramatically different Farm Bill proposals which both include unjust funding cuts for SNAP. The Senate bill cuts \$4 bil-

lion from SNAP over 10 years while the House bill slashes more than \$40 billion—denying food to as many as six million people, including children, seniors, and veterans. The House proposal would also drop 210,000 children from school meals and cost our economy 55,000 jobs in the first year alone.

Any agreed upon Farm Bill cuts to the already meager SNAP food benefits will come on top of the \$11 billion cut over the next

three years that already began on Nov. 1 and affected every single SNAP recipient. This recent cut was equivalent to a week's worth of meals for a nine-year-old. SNAP benefits now average a mere \$1.40 per person per meal. Imagine preparing your holiday meal on that budget.

SNAP lifted 2.2 million children out of poverty in 2012 and provided benefits to over 46 million Americans on average ev-

ery month, including more than 22 million, or more than one in four, children. SNAP was a life saver for millions of families in need during the recent recession and still sluggish recovery. Nearly three-quarters of SNAP households are families with children. Any additional cuts will take desperately needed food away from many vulnerable children and adults.

At a time when child poverty remains at a record high, and

when three-quarters of our nation's teachers report students who routinely show up to school hungry and half report hunger to be a serious problem in their classrooms, what kind of political leaders could for one minute consider cutting children's food assistance while protecting subsidies for rich farmers?

Hunger and malnutrition have devastating consequences for children and have been linked to

needy children who received food assistance before age five were in better health as adults. Specifically, the girls studied were more likely to complete more schooling, earn more money, and not rely on safety net programs as adults.

Adults who care and have common and economic sense would strengthen and not cut this critical lifeline for children. During the holidays, those of us blessed with enough or too much food can show our gratitude for living in a wealthy country where we can take action and urge our political leaders to put hungry children before rich farmers. And as millions of us sit down to a holiday dinner let us offer a simple Thanksgiving grace:

God, we thank You for this food; for the hands that planted it; for the hands that tended it; for the hands that harvested it; for the hands that prepared it; for the hands that provided it; and for the hands that served it. And we pray for those without enough food in Your world and in our land of plenty.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

What kind of political leaders could for one minute consider cutting children's food assistance while protecting subsidies for rich farmers?

Boss Should Not Dictate Health Care Choices

People are trying to take this right away

BY VALERIE JARRETT

Ensuring the full freedom of women as health care consumers to access essential preventative health services is a



vital component of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). And nowhere are health decisions more personal or essential to keep in their hands, than those regarding

reproductive health.

The ACA was designed to ensure that health care decisions are made between a woman and her doctor, and not by her boss, or Washington politicians.

Today, there are people trying to take this right away from women, by letting private, for-profit corporations and employers make medical decisions for their employees, based on their personal beliefs.

A group of for-profit companies are currently suing to gain the right to deny employees ac-

cess to coverage for birth control and contraceptive care, which are used by the overwhelming majority of American women in their lifetimes.

Among the first cases to reach the Supreme Court is one filed by Hobby Lobby, an arts and crafts chain whose owners want to be able to take the option for birth control benefits away from their employees.

We are confident the Supreme Court will agree that health decisions in this country should remain with individuals, in consultation with their doctors, families, faiths, and whomever else

they personally trust.

No corporate entity should be in position to limit women's legal access to care, or to seize a controlling interest over the health care choices of women.

To take that type of power away from individuals, and to let the personal beliefs of a

woman's boss dictate her health care choices would constitute a major step backward for women's health, and self-determination.

Valerie Jarrett is a senior advisor to the President and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls.

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