

“After my father died, people would tell stories about how, during the Great Depression, he gave them food from the store when they couldn’t afford to pay. If he had food on the shelves, he couldn’t stand to see someone else go hungry, especially a child. I feel exactly the same way.”

Herb Kohl

Ending Hunger

On March 16, 2000, Senator Kohl traveled to Nicolet Elementary School in Green Bay Wisconsin to chair a field hearing on hunger in Wisconsin. In his opening statement, he said:

“I and you would be disappointed and ill-served if today's event was just a chance for some of us to give a speech. Instead I want to tell you briefly what we are going to do to address the concerns that you have come today to raise.

“We are committing to you today to bring to communities like Green Bay more food and resources to feed the hungry and to bring children everywhere more opportunities to get a decent meal...Number 1, we will work to pass legislation to increase the participation in the programs that provide hot lunches to low-income small children in childcare centers and family daycare homes. Number 2, we will work to pass legislation to authorize and provide funding for a program giving incentives to schools to start a school breakfast program. Wisconsin unfortunately is last in the nation in provision of a healthy breakfast to its hungry students and we are going to turn that figure around.

Senator, on behalf of all of us in Green Bay who deal with these issues, please accept our deep and sincere thanks for coming here today...Please know that we all recognize and appreciate the important work you are doing in Washington on behalf of the less fortunate children and families in our community.

**Brett Bicoy, Brown County Community Foundation
March 16, 2000**

“Number 3, we will work to expand our current after-school feeding programs by encouraging sponsors to serve snacks for children between the ages of 13 and 18...

“And number 4, current law keeps Wisconsin from participating in ...a program that provides supplemental food to women, infants, children and the elderly. We will work to change that law, bring Wisconsin into the program, and fight for more resources to get this surplus food into our communities....I promise to keep our meeting here brief so we can all get back to the work we do and need to do to make sure every child in Wisconsin starts the day well fed and ready to learn.”

“It was classic Herb Kohl,” remembers Galen Fountain, Kohl’s long time clerk on the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture. “Most politicians use field hearings to get a couple pictures in the local papers. But Senator Kohl wouldn’t even let us get on the plane to go staff the hearing until we could tell him exactly what he could do to solve the problems his constituents were showing up to talk about. So we put together a list of four, substantive reforms, and I’ll be damned if he didn’t get every single one done.”

School Breakfast

“One of my colleagues used to tell a story about an elementary teacher he knew,” remembers Senator Kohl. “Once day, that teacher was lecturing the class on starting the day with a healthy breakfast. He asked for a show of hands: ‘How many ate a big breakfast

Whereas in fiscal year 2009, approximately 9,100,000 low-income children in the United States consumed free or reduced price school breakfasts on an average school day;

Whereas for every 100 children receiving free and reduced price lunches, approximately 47 children receive free and reduced price breakfasts;

Whereas the current economic situation (including the increase in families living below the poverty line) is causing more families to struggle to feed their children and to turn to schools for assistance;

Whereas studies have shown that access to nutritious meals under the school lunch program and the school breakfast program helps to create a strong learning environment for children and helps to improve the concentration of children in the classroom [and] to improve attentiveness and academic performance, while reducing tardiness and disciplinary referrals;

Whereas studies suggest that children who eat breakfasts have more adequate nutrition and intake of nutrients, such as calcium, fiber, protein, and vitamins A, E, D, and B-6 [and] eat more fruits, drink more milk, and consume less saturated fat than children who do not eat breakfast;

Be it resolved that the Senate... recognizes the importance of the school breakfast program established by section 4 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1773) and the overall positive impact of the program on the lives of low-income children and families, as well as the effect of the program on helping to improve the overall classroom performance of a child

I want to thank you publicly, Senator Kohl, for your steadfast, enthusiastic and sincere commitment to solving those problems of hunger in our communities and around the country. You've been a true friend of the programs on the Hill, especially the school breakfast program. We are so grateful for your ongoing support...

**Shirley Watkins, Under Secretary for
Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services,
U.S. Department of Agriculture
March 16, 2000**

that morning?' Fifteen kids raised their hands. 'How many had any breakfast?' Five more hands shot up."

"What about the rest of you?" the teacher asked. 'Why wouldn't you have a good breakfast when you know how important it is?' One small girl slowly raised her hand and answered: 'It wasn't my turn.'"

"That story breaks my heart," Kohl says. "But more than that, it makes me angry. We are a rich country, even in these hard times. No child should ever have to wait for a turn to eat."

In 1999, the Food Research and Action Center released a School Breakfast Scorecard that focused Kohl's outrage over child hunger in America. While the report showed that a record number of schools across the nation

were offering school breakfasts – 80 percent of those that also offered school lunch – Wisconsin had the worst record in the country with only 30 percent of its schools serving students a meal in the morning.

"That just didn't reflect the Wisconsin I know," remembers Kohl. "We care about our kids deeply. Something else had to be going on."

Kohl set out to find out what that was, questioning teachers, parents, school officials, and state representatives. "Everyone wanted to make a breakfast program available," says Kohl. "But for many the start-up costs were daunting – altered bus schedules, new equipment, extra staff and supplies."

In November of 1999, Kohl introduced S.1958, legislation to Improve Participation in the School Breakfast Program, a bill that offered incentives and technical assistance to schools wanting to start a breakfast program. The next year, using his seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, Kohl launched a demonstration program in Wisconsin to test whether, with some help at the front end, schools could soon make school breakfast as prevalent as school lunch.

The idea worked. Over the next four years, Kohl's school breakfast start-up grants allowed hundreds of Wisconsin schools to begin or expand school breakfast programs. By 2007, the Food Research and Action Center singled out Wisconsin as the "most improved" state in that year's School Breakfast Scorecard, first among the 45 states that had increased the number of children getting breakfast before school. The latest edition of that report again highlights Wisconsin's efforts, listing it as one of only five states that saw double digit growth in the number of low-income children receiving school breakfast. Today, on average, almost 163,000 Wisconsin kids will start their day with a healthy breakfast at school.

In 2003, buoyed by the success of the school breakfast demonstration program in Wisconsin, Kohl was ready to take his idea to the whole nation. As part of his comprehensive child nutrition initiative, he introduced S.1020, the School Breakfast Improvement Act of 2003, creating school breakfast start-up and expansion grants for which any state could compete.

Said Kohl at the time of the bill's introduction: "As a society, we cannot sit idly by as so many of our nation's children go hungry every day...We must face this challenge with the understanding that widespread hunger deprives so many of so much – not simply food, but the capacity to learn, grow, and live full and enriched lives."

S.1020 was signed into law June 30, 2004 as part of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act.

Congress again took up child nutrition programs in 2007, and again Kohl was ready with legislation that year (S.2143) and in 2009 (S.1480) to expand the number of schools participating in the breakfast start-up grant program he had created. When Congress finally agreed on the Healthy, Hunger Free Kid Act on December 13, 2010, Kohl's mark was once more on the school breakfast sections.

The Child and Adult Care Feeding Program

Though perhaps his most known accomplishment relating to child nutrition, expanding school breakfast was not the first initiative Kohl mentioned at his Green Bay hearing on child hunger in

Does feeding kids breakfast help? Schools participating in the breakfast program reported a decrease in the number of students visiting the school nurse for headaches and stomach aches that one could assume stem from hunger. Feeding students offers them one less thing to worry about. If they are not worrying about being hungry, maybe they can focus on their subjects.

**"Don't Skip This Meal,"
Milwaukee Journal
Sentinel
December 8, 2009**

Days after Senator Kohl introduced his initiative to stem child hunger in the United States, 47 national and 16 Wisconsin organizations called on Congress to pass Kohl's bills. These groups included:

• **Food Research and Action Center**

• **America's Second Harvest**

• **Congressional Hunger Center**

• **American Dietetic Association**

• **American Association of School Administrators**

• **National Education Association**

• **Green Bay Area Public Schools Food Service Department**

• **Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee**

• **Wisconsin CACFP Association**

2000. Working to “pass legislation to increase the participation in the programs that provide hot lunches to low-income small children in childcare centers and family daycare homes” was number one on the list that day.

Through USDA's Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (or “CACFP”), certified day care and after school providers are reimbursed for the healthy meals and snacks they provide their charges ages 12 and under if at least 25 percent of the children are low income. CACFP not only provides extra income to fund food purchases; it also trains participating providers in nutrition and healthy cooking, inspects facilities, and educates parents. These activities, as much as the food subsidies, help ensure that even the smallest or in-house child care providers know how to serve nourishing meals and have the financial means to do so.

“The challenge of seeing that children in child or after school care eat right is immense,” states Kohl. “The school lunch and breakfast programs are carried out in our school systems, so the infrastructure is in place to deliver healthy meals. But for day care, providers are all over the place – in centers, sure, but also at churches, in houses, even in homeless shelters. Yet these kids, especially the youngest ones, need regular, nutritious meals too.”

Though the legislation creating CACFP was in place in 2000, a technical glitch meant that fewer and fewer day care and afterschool programs qualified to participate – even those serving 100 percent low income children. Kohl set out to fix the problem. Speaking before the National Child Care Association, he said “The goals of this child nutrition program are so important and so right that it is worth our every effort to make this program work.”

“What we needed to do was get a bill passed to fix the problem,” remembers Kate Sparks, Kohl's legislative director at the time. “Of course, that wasn't going to happen overnight, but try explaining that to Senator Kohl. He's not a patient man when he sees kids suffering.”

Kohl's first move was to work directly with the states to find ways around the glitch. Then in 2001, he was able to add an amendment

to the budget that permanently fixed the problem. But he didn't stop there.

In May of 2003, as part of the same comprehensive child nutrition initiative that contained Kohl's legislation expanding the school breakfast pilot program, he offered S.1022, the Child and Adult Care Food Program Improvements Act of 2003. His bill made more centers eligible for CACFP and created a program to allow emergency shelters to provide dinner up to the age of 18 (instead of 12 in the law at the time). In June of 2004, when President Bush signed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 into law, again Kohl's reforms were in the final product.

Almost ten years after the Green Bay hearing, Senator Kohl continued to work on the plans for CACFP he articulated there. In 2009, he succeeded in getting Wisconsin added to the list of the states eligible to provide supper benefits under CACFP for all children under 18, a move that meant 18,000 more teens a day in Wisconsin would be fed a healthy evening meal.

Can it be that thousands of children living in the capital city of the strongest, and one of the richest, nations on earth are going hungry this summer? It can... Today, there are children in the District whose only consistent meal is the one they receive in federally funded summer feeding programs. These children still go hungry because they don't get enough to eat at home. They are kids that show up for summer programs at 8 a.m. with only the clothes on their back and hunger pangs. It is a state of affairs that should shame the city and the nation.

**"Hunger in the Nation's Capital,"
Washington Post
July 17, 2002**

Said Sherrie Tussler, executive director of the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee: "With so many children in need, it is more important than ever to find ways to provide three meals a day. Kids growing up in this economic climate face plenty of challenges, but now going to bed hungry doesn't have to be one of them. Thanks to Senator Kohl for his leadership securing the supper waiver for school aged children in our state."

Summer Food Service Program

"There are kids in every state in this nation who dread the end of the school year," Senator Kohl remarks. "While their classmates may be dreaming about lazy days at the beach or the ball park, thousands of American children are instead dreading losing perhaps the only meal they get each day – from their school lunch or breakfast program."

As Kohl became more involved with the school breakfast program and the CACFP, he saw firsthand how important those meals were to

A Sample of Awards received by Senator Kohl in recognition for his work on hunger and child nutrition:

- Hero, National Child Care Association, 1999
- Leadership Award, National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, 2001
- Leadership Award, National Association of Women, Infants, and Children's Program, 2002
- Distinguished Service Award, Food Research and Action Center, 2003
- Leadership Award, Family Services of Northeastern Wisconsin, 2004
- Inaugural Best of Congress Award, Working Mother, 2007-2008
- Friend of Children, Wisconsin School Psychologists, 2009
- Mickey Leland Hunger Leader award, Congressional Hunger Center, 2009
- Best of Congress Award, Working Mother, 2009-2010
- Best of Congress Award, Working Mother, 2011-2012
- Giraffe Award, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2012
- Star Advocate, School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin, 2012

low-income kids. "One year, we travelled around Wisconsin, trying to eat lunch at as many schools as we could," Kohl remembers. "It was a lot of fun, but heartbreaking too, especially if we showed up on a Monday. The way some kids would tear into that meal, you just knew it was the first thing they had had to eat in a long time, maybe all weekend."

Kohl's experiences visiting Wisconsin schools turned him into a fierce advocate of the summer food service program. He honed in on a pilot project developed by Indiana Senator Richard Lugar: the Simplified Summer Food Program. Like Kohl's school breakfast start-up grants, the Simplified Summer Food Program made it easier for sites to sign up to offer meals to children.

"Senator Kohl never thought the only answer to a problem was to throw money at it," recalls Paul Bock, Kohl's former chief of staff and a key participant in staff negotiations over the Summer Food Program. "He wanted to get organizations the funds they needed to set up summer feeding sites, sure, but he also wanted to make certain they weren't discouraged by unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy."

In 2002, Kohl used his position as chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to expand the Simplified Summer Food Program pilot in the budget, a decision the Republican Senate reversed when they took over in 2003. Kohl was furious, taking to the floor to decry the decision: "These bipartisan programs are important to the well-being of our low-income and rural children and should not be candidates for the chopping block."

Later that year, Kohl made expansion of the Simplified Summer Food Program pilot the third prong of his initiative to combat child hunger with S. 1021, the Summer Food Service Program Improvement Act of 2003. Like his bills on school breakfast and the CACFP, S. 1021 became

law with the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act in 2004.

And, as with school breakfast and the CACFP, Kohl's involvement with the Summer Food Program did not end with the passage of his legislation. In October of 2005, he was able to announce that the pilot had been expanded from 13 to 20 states, and that Wisconsin was one of the seven states newly admitted. By 2008, all fifty states could participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program.

CSFP and WIC

As the final action item raised at his 2000 Green Bay hearing, Senator Kohl vowed to bring Wisconsin into the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and “fight for more resources to get this surplus food into our communities.”

USDA runs CSFP through state and volunteer agencies that distribute a monthly package of healthy foods, many procured from the nation's stocks of surplus commodities, to low income individuals. Though originally designed to serve participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, commonly known as “WIC,” today 97 percent of CSFP beneficiaries are low income senior citizens.

“It makes sense for them,” Kohl points out. “CSFP delivers the food to their homes and familiar places like senior centers; it is not like food stamps, which many seniors are too proud to sign up for. There's no complicated paperwork, and they don't have to go to the store and pick out qualifying foods. Their package is put together for them, designed to stretch their grocery budget for the month.”

“Plus it is a good deal for the government. We are already buying the commodities under our price support programs. Why shouldn't we use them to help out seniors who might otherwise go hungry?”

The issue of hunger in America has been of concern to me for many years. As Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee, I have been uniquely positioned to address hunger at all stages of life. Each year I work to increase federal funding for healthy babies through the Women, Infants and Children Program, also known as WIC; for growing children through school breakfast programs; and—most relevant to today's hearing—for older Americans through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which provides a modest box of grocery staples every month to 440,000 low-income elderly Americans.

Federal programs like the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Elderly Nutrition Program, as well as non-profit organizations such as Meals on Wheels, make a huge impact by delivering food directly to seniors in their own homes. The Food Stamp program is another valuable federal program, although estimates show that it is under-utilized: only one in three eligible seniors actually enroll in the food stamp program. In spite of the fact that these programs and services cover only a fraction of the low-income seniors who need them, we continue to face a yearly battle with the administration to provide these programs with adequate funding.

As we will hear today, over 5 million seniors experience some form of food insecurity. Of these, 2.5 million are at-risk of hunger and 750,000 suffer from hunger due to poverty. The experience of these American seniors—who often must forego food in order to pay bills, buy medicine, or feed a family member—is unimaginable to most of us in this room today.

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Hearing
“Seniors Going Hungry in America: A Call to
Action and Warning for the Future”
March 5, 2008**

Benefits Received by WIC Participants

All participants receive:

- Screening for nutrition and health needs.
- Information on how to use WIC foods to improve health.
- Checks to buy foods that help keep you and your children healthy and strong.
- Referrals to doctors, dentists, and programs like FoodShare, Medicaid, BadgerCare Plus, Wisconsin Works (W-2) and Head Start.

Women receive:

- WIC foods.
- Information on healthy eating during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Help with starting or continuing breastfeeding.

Infants receive:

- Help with starting or continuing breastfeeding.
- Infant formula, if needed.
- Immunization referrals.
- Parents/caregivers receive information on taking care of babies.

Children receive:

- WIC foods.
- Immunization referrals.
- Parents/caregivers receive information on food shopping, recipes and feeding a child.

Health benefits of WIC:

- Premature births reduced.
- Low birth-weight reduced.
- Long-term medical expenses reduced.

**Wisconsin Department of Health
Services Website, 2012**

Good to his word, Kohl used his position on the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee to make sure the CSFP was fully funded, despite vigorous opposition during the years when the Republicans controlled the White House. Year after year, Kohl would grill different cabinet officials about their plans to cut drastically or eliminate the program. His frustration boiled over in a 2006 interview with the Associated Press: “It really does come under the category, in the most extreme way, of balancing the budget on the backs of those who are most needy. And in this case, we’re not even balancing the budget.”

So, year after year, Kohl would lead the charge to restore the funds the CSFP needed to deliver healthy, even life saving, food packages to up to 500,000 seniors each month. “This has never been a partisan issue, even though my annual dust up with the previous Administration makes it look that way,” he states. “We would have never had the success we did -- through Democratic, Republican, and split Congresses -- if there hadn’t been quite a few Republican Senators who felt as strongly as I did about the CSFP.”

Kohl faced similar White House opposition to, and gathered a similarly bipartisan band of supporters for, WIC, which provides vouchers for nutritious food to poor pregnant and breast feeding women and their children to the age of 5. According to the USDA, WIC currently feeds 53 percent of all infants born in the United States.

“Like the CSFP, WIC makes sense, from both a humanitarian perspective and a budget

perspective,” argues Kohl. “It is cost effective. When mothers eat right during pregnancy, they are more likely to have a full term, healthy baby. When those babies are fed nutritious food, they are more likely to thrive. All of that adds up to measurable decreases in Medicaid expenses.”

This was a point Kohl would make again and again during debate on the Senate’s Agricultural Appropriations bill. By 2007, Kohl was so frustrated with the Administration low-balling in its budget estimates of the number of eligible WIC participants and food prices, he authored a provision, which became law, requiring monthly accounts of WIC’s ongoing costs from USDA.

When, in 2008, Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer again proposed a budget with an insufficient increase for WIC – and without the monthly cost estimates required by law – Kohl blew up, calling the proposal “detached from reality.”

“It would be difficult to fathom, given current economic trends, that the administration realistically believes an increase of \$80 million is an appropriate amount...Outside estimates show that the WIC level requested in the budget is at least \$400 million below the amount necessary to fully fund participation...It would be difficult to overstate the seriousness with which I view this issue.”

There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies.

-- Sir Winston Churchill

If there were any doubts about Kohl’s commitment to WIC left after that exchange, they were laid to rest a few months later when the full Senate Appropriations Committee reported their budget for the year. Partnering with Republican and staunch conservative Robert Bennett of Utah, Kohl secured a funding level for WIC more than double what the administration had proposed and adequate to cover all those in need – a number that had shot up with the growing recession. Kohl expressed satisfaction, and relief, that a bipartisan coalition had again been able to balance scarce federal funding with “the nutrition needs of our most helpless citizens.”

“Since then, it has been easier to win approval for sufficient WIC funding, though some of that may be due to the changes at the White House,” admits Kohl. “But I like to think we have had some success convincing Washington that fighting hunger, especially among pregnant women, new mothers, and children, is a worthy investment.”

Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee

Senator Kohl never shied away from taking on national issues, and his decades championing school breakfast, summer feeding programs, CACFP, CSFP, and WIC clearly demonstrate that. But he never forgot who sent him to the Senate and never failed to tie his national campaigns back to the interests of Wisconsin.

Nowhere is that more evident than in Kohl's long partnership with the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee. Through a broad network of food pantries, homeless shelters, and soup kitchens, the task force has fought hunger in Milwaukee and beyond since 1974. Kohl and the task force have worked together on everything from the child nutrition bills in 2004 and 2010 to the waiver that allowed 18,000 additional Wisconsin teens to participate in the CACFP supper program to the implementation of the Kohl school breakfast pilot program.

But the battle that cemented their relationship was over an innovative pilot program through which the Hunger Task Force turned surplus nonfat dry milk into Wisconsin-made mozzarella cheese to distribute to needy families through its food pantries. "The program was a big hit," Kohl remembers. "People – and especially kids – would much rather get cheese, and especially Wisconsin cheese, than drink powdered nonfat milk."

In 2003, Kohl got USDA to agree to work with the Hunger Task Force on the pilot. But early in 2004, the USDA told Kohl they did not intend to extend the program. He immediately started working the phones.

Kohl's agriculture aides also got involved, contacting every department official they could reach to impress on them how serious Kohl was. "He made it quite clear that he wanted Secretary Veneman to have an answer for him at our March 25th hearing in the Appropriations Committee –

In February, Agriculture Department officials said a one-month pilot program under which surplus non-fat dry milk went to the Waupun-based Alto Dairy Cooperative, in exchange for cheese for the needy in Milwaukee County, could not continue.

Uncle Sam sits on 961 million pounds of surplus dry milk, doling some of it out to feed cattle, buffalo, sheep and goats...The irony of which mouths were being fed by the feds led the [Hunger Task Force] to craft a battle cry – "Kids, not cows" – and seek help from Wisconsin Senator Herb Kohl.

Veneman, addressing Kohl at a Senate hearing Thursday, publically relented for the first time, saying the pilot could continue for a year...

In an interview later, Kohl said that previous [discussions] with the Agriculture Department...yielded one answer – "No." So he appealed to Veneman in a phone call.

"You reach one person, talk to them and in 24 hours they can literally change a 'No' to a 'Yes.' I don't know who she talked to. I don't know if she spoke to the White House. (But) it is really good stuff. That kind of stuff doesn't happen every day around here. It is really to everybody's credit that we were able to get something done overnight in this town."

"Cheesehead persuasion pays off for the city food bank – and the poor"
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
March 25, 2004

and that that answer better be ‘yes,’” remembers Kohl clerk Galen Fountain.

Veneman appeared at the hearing and told Kohl that USDA would extend the pilot another year, a victory for the Hunger Task Force that Kohl called one of the quickest turnarounds on an issue that he had experienced since coming to Washington.

“I was surprised at the time, but in retrospect, it makes sense. Here is one of the biggest issues USDA handles – hunger – and a cost-effective and successful pilot program combating it. The answer should have been ‘yes’ all along.”