

Ending Child Hunger

By Bob Dole and George McGovern

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When he delivered his Nobel Lecture in 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked, "Why should there be hunger and privation in any land, in any city, at any table when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with the basic necessities of life?" More than 40 years later, we are still asking the same question in our own country.

As we honor Dr. King, it is an important time to think about the hopes and dreams we share for our children. Too many live in poverty and start each school day hungry, which lessens the odds that they will be able to rise above the challenges they face.

In our nation's public schools, 29 million children participate in the school lunch program each day -- 17 million from low-income households -- while only nine million receive breakfast. Some of these children get breakfast at home, but many do not. They go to school hungry and unable to concentrate, which puts them at a disadvantage to succeed before the day even starts. It's a rarely discussed problem with wide-ranging implications for all Americans, not just our children. Their future is our future.

That is why we have joined the new "got breakfast?" campaign as national spokesmen. "Got breakfast?" was launched last month by leaders in the Federal government, nonprofit and private sectors to raise awareness about the problem of child hunger and to promote the adoption of healthy breakfast programs in our nation's school systems.

The issues of child hunger and school nutrition have occupied a spot at the top of our agendas for all of our public lives. As members of the United States Senate we worked together to write and enact legislation designed to improve nutrition in our nation's schools. We have continued to work together to address these issues since leaving the Senate. The fight is a constant and ongoing battle.

The challenge of feeding millions of children may seem enormous, but there are more solutions available today than ever before to help us eliminate child hunger. Unfortunately, one answer that is sitting right in front of us is not being

used to its fullest potential. A brand new report by the Food Research Action Center estimates that states have failed to access more than \$382 million in federal funds that could have been used to provide breakfast at school to children in need.

While we have all seen the success of the National School Lunch Program, its companion, the School Breakfast Program has been significantly underutilized. FRAC notes that for every 100 low-income children who eat school lunch every day, only 44 eat a school breakfast. Through the "got breakfast?" campaign, we are seeking to remind school administrators, teachers and parents that the School Breakfast Program is a viable, easily implemented solution to an unnecessary problem.

Developed by Share Our Strength, the Alliance to End Hunger, the School Nutrition Association, the National Dairy Council and Breakfast Breaks, "got breakfast?" demonstrates how the nonprofit and private sectors can join together to achieve a common goal. By working together, we can ensure that our children get the nutritious breakfast they need in order to have a productive, successful day at school -- and a productive, successful life ahead.

With greater concern over how to remain competitive in a global marketplace, it is vital that we provide the best possible education and learning environment for the next generation of Americans. Nutrition is a critical building block for realizing this goal. Hungry children cannot learn and an uneducated workforce cannot compete. For these reasons, it is critical that we work together to encourage participation in the School Breakfast Program so that every child can reap the benefits of a healthy breakfast.

Former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas is a Republican. Former Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota is a Democrat. Both are former presidential candidates. They are paid for some of their efforts as spokesmen for the "got breakfast?" campaign.

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