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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DRIEHAUS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
November 17, 2009.

I hereby appoint the Honorable STEVE DRIEHAUS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2009, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the U.S. Department of Agriculture released the annual Household Food Security in the United States report for 2008. The findings of this report are nothing short of alarming and frightening. This report found the highest level of food insecurity since the study began in 1995. While just over 85 percent of U.S. households were food secure in 2008, the bad news, the fright-

ening news, is that 14.6 percent, 17 million households, were food insecure in 2008. This means that at some point during 2008, these households "had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources."

According to the USDA, over 49 million people lived in those 17 million households. In other words, Mr. Speaker, according to this report, 49 million Americans went hungry in 2008. We should be ashamed of ourselves. In the richest, most prosperous nation in the world, a country where we have the means to end hunger, a country where we have the food readily available, we continue to allow 49 million people to be hungry in this country. And if that weren't bad enough, food insecurity is likely to get worse, not better, next year.

Mr. Speaker, this report also found that 17 million children, more than one in five, went without food at some point during the year. That's an increase of 5 million children over the previous year. Even worse, the number of children living in very low food insecure households—the hungriest of the hungry—rose from 323,000 in 2007 to 506,000 in 2008. That means that almost 2 million children are among the hungriest of the hungry in America.

Race and gender are also factors. About 37 percent of single mothers struggled for food in 2008. And more disturbing, more than one in seven said that someone in their household had been hungry. The report found that African Americans and Hispanics were more than twice as likely as whites to report food insecurity at home.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. We must do better. I want to thank President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for their dedication to combating hunger in America. Secretary Vilsack personally released this report yesterday, and President Obama released a statement, two actions that the previous adminis-

tration declined to make. I don't say this to place blame, but rather to say that admitting there is a problem is the first step towards addressing that problem. President Obama has committed his administration to ending child hunger by 2015. That's something we can and should do. Continuing to raise awareness of this issue is critical, no matter how bad the statistics may be.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate to have in place a safety net system that prevents more people from going without food. Undoubtedly, even more Americans would go hungry if it weren't for SNAP—formerly known as food stamps—WIC, school and summer meals, and the other Federal anti-hunger programs.

Later this week, I will be introducing legislation that will expand these programs to better combat hunger in the United States. The End Childhood Hunger by 2015 Act will not only expand the purchasing power of SNAP, but it will increase the number of people who are eligible for these Federal anti-hunger programs. For example, under this bill, every child who goes to school, regardless of income, will receive a quality, nutritious breakfast and lunch. We know that children learn better and develop properly when they eat nutritious meals. Unfortunately, many children don't have access to nutritious meals either at home or at school. We provide textbooks for all children. Why shouldn't we provide at least two nutritious meals too?

Now is the time for us to refocus our energy on ending hunger once and for all, and it will require Presidential leadership. I introduced legislation calling for a White House Conference on Food and Nutrition. I will be working with Speaker PELOSI, Chairman PETERSON and Chairman MILLER to pass this important legislation, and I encourage my colleagues to cosponsor H.R. 2297.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Mr. Speaker, we may not be able to end all war and disease in our lifetimes, but we can end hunger if we muster the political will to do so. This report should be a rallying point report for Congress and the administration. While this Congress focuses on the Nation's economic recovery and job creation, we must not forget about those who are going without food. Let's commit ourselves once and for all to ending hunger as we know it in America.

I would like to insert into the RECORD the statement by President Obama and news articles from The New York Times and Washington Post on the release of this report.

THE WHITE HOUSE,
OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY,
Washington, DC, November 16, 2009.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE RELEASE OF THE ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY REPORT

As American families prepare to gather for Thanksgiving, we received an unsettling report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that found that hunger rose significantly last year. This trend was already painfully clear in many communities across our nation, where food stamp applications are surging and food pantry shelves are emptying.

It is particularly troubling that there were more than 500,000 families in which a child experienced hunger multiple times over the course of the year. Our children's ability to grow, learn, and meet their full potential—and therefore our future competitiveness as a nation—depends on regular access to healthy meals.

My Administration is committed to reversing the trend of rising hunger. The first task is to restore job growth, which will help relieve the economic pressures that make it difficult for parents to put a square meal on the table each day. But we are also taking targeted steps to prevent Americans from experiencing hunger. Earlier this year, we extended help to those hit hardest by this economic downturn by boosting SNAP benefits. And Secretary Vilsack is working hard to make sure eligible families are able to access those benefits as well as the School Lunch and Breakfast Program. In addition, a bill I signed into law last month invests \$85 million in new strategies to prevent children from experiencing hunger in the summer.

Hunger is a problem that we can solve together, and I look forward to working with Congress to pass a strong child nutrition bill that will help children get the healthy meals they need to grow and succeed—and help keep America competitive in the decades to come.

The full USDA Household Food Security report can be viewed here: www.ers.usda.gov/features/householdfoodsecurity/

[From the New York Times, Nov. 17, 2009]

HUNGER IN U.S. AT A 14-YEAR HIGH

(By Jason DeParle)

WASHINGTON—The number of Americans who lived in households that lacked consistent access to adequate food soared last year, to 49 million, the highest since the government began tracking what it calls "food insecurity" 14 years ago, the Department of Agriculture reported Monday.

The increase, of 13 million Americans, was much larger than even the most pessimistic observers of hunger trends had expected and cast an alarming light on the daily hardships caused by the recession's punishing effect on jobs and wages.

About a third of these struggling households had what the researchers called "very low food security," meaning lack of money forced members to skip meals, cut portions or otherwise forgo food at some point in the year.

The other two-thirds typically had enough to eat, but only by eating cheaper or less varied foods, relying on government aid like food stamps, or visiting food pantries and soup kitchens.

"These numbers are a wake-up call for the country," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

One figure that drew officials' attention was the number of households, 506,000, in which children faced "very low food security": up from 323,000 the previous year. President Obama, who has pledged to end childhood hunger by 2015, released a statement while traveling in Asia that called the finding "particularly troubling."

The ungainly phrase "food insecurity" stems from years of political and academic wrangling over how to measure adequate access to food. In the 1980s, when officials of the Reagan administration denied there was hunger in the United States, the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington advocacy group, began a survey that concluded otherwise. Over time, Congress had the Agriculture Department oversee a similar survey, which the Census Bureau administers.

Though researchers at the Agriculture Department do not use the word "hunger," Mr. Obama did. "Hunger rose significantly last year," he said.

Analysts said the main reason for the growth was the rise in the unemployment rate, to 7.2 percent at the end of 2008 from 4.9 percent a year earlier. And since it now stands at 10.2 percent, the survey might in fact understate the number of Americans struggling to get adequate food.

Rising food prices, too, might have played a role.

The food stamp rolls have expanded to record levels, with 36 million Americans now collecting aid, an increase of nearly 40 percent from two years ago. And the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed last winter, raised the average monthly food stamp benefit per person by about 17 percent, to \$133. Many states have made it easier for those eligible to apply, but rising applications and staffing cuts have also brought long delays.

Problems gaining access to food were highest in households with children headed by single mothers. About 37 percent of them reported some form of food insecurity compared with 14 percent of married households with children. About 29 percent of Hispanic households reported food insecurity, compared with 27 percent of black households and 12 percent of white households. Serious problems were most prevalent in the South, followed equally by the West and Midwest.

Some conservatives have attacked the survey's methodology, saying it is hard to define what it measures. The 18-item questionnaire asks about skipped meals and hunger pangs, but also whether people had worries about getting food. It ranks the severity of their condition by the number of answers that indicate a problem.

"Very few of these people are hungry," said Robert Rector, an analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "When they lose jobs, they constrain the kind of food they buy. That is regrettable, but it's a far cry from a hunger crisis."

The report measures the number of households that experienced problems at any point in the year. Only a "small fraction" were facing the problem at a given moment. Among those with "very low food security," for instance, most experienced the condition

for several days in each of seven or eight months.

James Weill, the director of the food center that pioneered the report, called it a careful look at an underappreciated condition. "Many people are outright hungry, skipping meals," he said. "Others say they have enough to eat but only because they're going to food pantries or using food stamps. We describe it as 'households struggling with hunger.'"

[From The Washington Post, Nov. 17, 2009]

AMERICA'S ECONOMIC PAIN BRINGS HUNGER PANGS

(By Amy Goldstein)

The nation's economic crisis has catapulted the number of Americans who lack enough food to the highest level since the government has been keeping track, according to a new federal report, which shows that nearly 50 million people—including almost one child in four—struggled last year to get enough to eat.

At a time when rising poverty, widespread unemployment and other effects of the recession have been well documented, the report released Monday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides the government's first detailed portrait of the toll that the faltering economy has taken on Americans' access to food.

The magnitude of the increase in food shortages—and, in some cases, outright hunger—identified in the report startled even the nation's leading anti-poverty advocates, who have grown accustomed to longer lines lately at food banks and soup kitchens. The findings also intensify pressure on the White House to fulfill a pledge to stamp out childhood hunger made by President Obama, who called the report "unsettling."

The data show that dependable access to adequate food has especially deteriorated among families with children. In 2008, nearly 17 million children, or 22.5 percent, lived in households in which food at times was scarce—4 million children more than the year before. And the number of youngsters who sometimes were outright hungry rose from nearly 700,000 to almost 1.1 million.

Among Americans of all ages, more than 16 percent—or 49 million people—sometimes ran short of nutritious food, compared with about 12 percent the year before. The deterioration in access to food during 2008 among both children and adults far eclipses that of any other single year in the report's history.

Around the Washington area, the data show, the extent of food shortages varies significantly. In the past three years, an average of 12.4 percent of households in the District had at least some problems getting enough food, slightly worse than the national average. In Maryland, the average was 9.6 percent, and in Virginia it was 8.6 percent.

The local and national findings are from a snapshot of food in the United States that the Agriculture Department has issued every year since 1995, based on Census Bureau surveys. It documents Americans who lack a dependable supply of adequate food—people living with some amount of "food insecurity" in the lexicon of experts—and those whose food shortages are so severe that they are hungry. The new report is based on a survey conducted in December.

Several independent advocates and policy experts on hunger said that they had been bracing for the latest report to show deepening shortages, but that they were nevertheless astonished by how much the problem has worsened. "This is unthinkable. It's like we are living in a Third World country," said Vicki Escarra, president of Feeding America, the largest organization representing food banks and other emergency food sources.

"It's frankly just deeply upsetting," said James D. Weill, president of the Washington-based Food and Action Center. As the economy eroded, Weill said, "you had more and more people getting pushed closer to the cliffs edge. Then this huge storm came along and pushed them over."

Obama, who pledged during last year's presidential campaign to eliminate hunger among children by 2015, reiterated that goal on Monday. "My Administration is committed to reversing the trend of rising hunger," the president said in a statement. The solution begins with job creation, Obama said. And he ticked off steps that Congress and the administration have taken, or are planning, including increases in food stamp benefits and \$85 million Congress just freed up through an appropriations bill to experiment with feeding more children during the summer, when subsidized school breakfasts and lunches are unavailable.

In a briefing for reporters, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said, "These numbers are a wake-up call . . . for us to get very serious about food security and hunger, about nutrition and food safety in this country."

Vilsack attributed the marked worsening in Americans' access to food primarily to the rise in unemployment, which now exceeds 10 percent, and in people who are underemployed. He acknowledged that "there could be additional increases" in the 2009 figures, due out a year from now, although he said it is not yet clear how much the problem might be eased by the measures the administration and Congress have taken this year to stimulate the economy.

The report's main author at USDA, Mark Nord, noted that other recent research by the agency has found that most families in which food is scarce contain at least one adult with a full-time job, suggesting that the problem lies at least partly in wages, not entirely an absence of work.

The report suggests that federal food assistance programs are only partly fulfilling their purpose, although Vilsack said that shortages would be much worse without them. Just more than half of the people surveyed who reported they had food shortages said that they had, in the previous month, participated in one of the government's largest anti-hunger and nutrition programs: food stamps, subsidized school lunches or WIC, the nutrition program for women with babies or young children.

Last year, people in 4.8 million households used private food pantries, compared with 3.9 million in 2007, while people in about 625,000 households resorted to soup kitchens, nearly 90,000 more than the year before.

Food shortages, the report shows, are particularly pronounced among women raising children alone. Last year, more than one in three single mothers reported that they struggled for food, and more than one in seven said that someone in their home had been hungry—far eclipsing the food problem in any other kind of household. The report also found that people who are black or Hispanic were more than twice as likely as whites to report that food in their home was scarce.

In the survey used to measure food shortages, people were considered to have food insecurity if they answered "yes" to several of a series of questions. Among the questions were whether, in the past year, their food sometimes ran out before they had money to buy more, whether they could not afford to eat nutritionally balanced meals, and whether adults in the family sometimes cut the size of their meals—or skipped them—because they lacked money for food. The report defined the degree of their food insecurity by the number of the questions to which they answered yes.

ANIMAL WELFARE IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ENTIRE NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, it seems the issues that face Congress fall into two categories: the issues that are so great, so expensive, so contentious, so complex that they seem almost beyond our ability to influence—war and peace, the economy, climate change and, more recently, health care—too big and too controversial for effective, quick, meaningful congressional action. The other category seems to be the simple and the mundane, almost too routine—housekeeping, like renaming a post office.

The truth is, we pursue both because they're an important part of our job and are important to the American public. We're not going to give up on the big issues of the day no matter how complex, controversial and frustrating because, after all, they are the big issues of the day. That's why we're here when even modest impact can have a huge ripple effect on lives around the world, the safety of Americans, protecting the public Treasury and our soldiers. A post office may seem mundane and trivial to some, but to the family of that fallen hero and community, it's very important indeed, as it is to all Americans who honor and respect that sacrifice. There is a reason for these items, low cost but high impact. Then there are vast numbers of issues that are sort of in between. Animal welfare is often put in that category, seemingly at times unimportant or trivial, tangential—except, of course, when it has a devastating impact on human health, safety and environmental balance.

I was recently touring the Everglades with my colleague DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Part of the briefing materials dealt with the problem of up to 100,000 pythons that started out as pets or exotic curiosities and ended up in that environment. Pets, farm animals, even whole alligators have been attacked and ingested. Earlier this summer, an infant in its crib was strangled by a python. Too expensive? Secondary? What's the price of that baby's life? And how much are we going to try to spend to reclaim the Everglade habitat from tens of thousands of pythons that have been described as the most lethal killing machine ever?

Earlier this year, I had legislation that overwhelmingly passed this House to ban the interstate transport of primates. It had been derided by one of my colleagues as a "monkey bite bill," ironically at just the same time a woman in Connecticut had her face ripped off by a neighbor's pet chimpanzee. I don't use that term metaphorically. Her face was literally ripped off. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the woman who was so horribly disfigured had the courage to take her story and her mangled face to the public on The

Oprah Winfrey Show this week. I simply cannot bring myself to display the picture on the floor of the House, but millions of viewers saw the tragic evidence for themselves.

It's too late for this woman and her family, but it's not too late for the other body to act so that we can make events like this less likely. It's a symbol of the dysfunctionality of the other body that one Member—ironically a doctor, of all people—has put a hold on this legislation, refusing to allow the Senate to even consider it, and inexplicably, the other body goes along. The reason, we're told, is cost. The Senator is concerned about cost. Well, what is the cost to a woman whose eyes were torn out of her head so she couldn't see her daughter on prom night? What is the cost of the unbelievable reconstructive surgery, taking flesh from her leg to try to replace part of the missing face?

Mr. Speaker, animal welfare is about much more than concern for God's creatures. It's about human welfare. It's about environmental balance. And yes, to the good doctor from Oklahoma, it's about saving money.

The millions of Americans who watched The Oprah Winfrey Show saw the tragic case and its consequences. They should ask themselves why their Senators are not speaking out, why the other body is not passing this simple bill that can have such significant consequences. It may not change the world, but if it prevents just a few cases like this, it will be another example of simple legislation that we cannot afford not to pass.

SUPPORT FOR THE AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia. I rise today to commend those who have endeavored to improve the provision of quality, affordable health care for all Americans and to refute those who use scare tactics to derail essential health insurance reform.

During the more than 12 hours of debate on the House floor on November 7, we heard a number of speeches from some forecasting various doom and gloom scenarios. Some of the material focused more on scaring the American public than on presenting actual facts. We heard preposterous stories of death panels and prisons, denial of care and dramatic cuts in services, but the purveyors of fear ignored the hundreds of groups across the Nation that saw through the scare tactics and who support responsible health insurance reform. Those groups aren't driven by partisan ideology. They're focused on the well-being of their members. I would like to highlight just a few.

The scare tactic said this bill will harm seniors. In actuality, the Affordable Health Care for America Act will help seniors by closing the Medicare