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Remarks of Hubert H. Humphrey, United States Senator  
National Food Distribution Programs Conference, Statler Hilton Hotel  
August 7, 1962

I am most happy to be here with you tonight. I feel strongly about these programs you administer and I have a lot to say about them. I'll try not to keep you past midnight. I'd like to turn them inside out and look at them within a certain context and as specific and individual programs.

As for the "certain context" part, I believe these programs, as a group, are now firmly established in the structure of America's thinking and America's doing. They've had an interesting development and, as Charlie Murphy said earlier today, they may now be considered a family of programs -- a family of food consumption programs. There is solid economic and political theory behind the idea of food consumption programs but, as is usually the case, there were a lot of years between the theoretical development of an approach and the actual development of practice.

One basic economic theory says that there is a market for anything at a price. When you reach the consumption saturation point, you quit producing. To understate it a bit -- this is difficult to do in the case of an agricultural economy with hundreds of thousands of farmers making their individual decisions. Come July and August and the market doesn't look as firm as it did in February, you aren't in a very good position to dig up the fields and start over again. Now, a necessary corollary of this production and marketing theory says that there will always be those who can't afford the item at the market price.

At this point you have several choices. You can say that is just too bad -- they can always eat bread and potatoes and stay alive. Or you can say that the Nation as a whole cannot tolerate such a situation and that, given a bit of ingenuity and mental flexibility, you can preserve the basic theory but adapt your practice to the realities of the situation. And the reality is very real indeed. The Nation needs a fit and healthy population. Whether we need a soldier, a member of the Peace Corps or whether we need simply a population that can face up to long, tense years of a Cold War -- we must be fit.

And we have learned the hard way that we may need to draw on more than those who could always afford to eat well.

The 1930's taught us a lot. A lot about theory and a lot about reality. The reality was hundreds of thousands of people who could not afford minimum housing, minimum food and decent clothing at the same time. The reality was farm foreclosures, milk dumped, fruits and vegetables destroyed because the economic theory had been pushed to the point that the people could not tolerate the effects.

So we looked at the situation. We had really hungry people and food being destroyed. And every father and mother knew it was really the children who would suffer. There had to be a way to get the food and the hungry people together and a way was found. It was a halting, uneven effort but quite a few people did get supplementary food through a variety of programs that presented an interesting patchwork of experimentation.

There was a penny milk program, a direct donation program, a school lunch program and a food stamp program. These were the nucleus of the food

consumption approach. The food consumption approach is one that evolved from recognition of the indisputable fact that the human stomach is not insatiable --- teen-age boys to the contrary. There was a time when we thought that if we could shift a good portion of our agricultural resources into livestock production we would have it made. Good food, high return to the farmer -- an obvious and simple solution. Then came a year when we had heavy supplies of livestock and extra-heavy slaughter because of drought. The public ate high on the hog that year but they couldn't eat meat fast enough to keep farm prices at living levels.

The food consumption approach is one that looks for those elements of the population that cannot afford a nutritionally adequate diet. Aside from population expansion, this is the one area we can look to as a potential market for those foods requiring high use of our agricultural productivity. A food consumption approach is also one that says it is essential to educate the public on the basics of nutrition so that of their own free choice they will select the foods they need for fitness.

Out of the experience of the 1930's, we gradually assembled the bits and pieces of programs until I believe we can now say that food consumption programs are deeply and widely accepted and established.

But let's look for a moment at the assumption behind this food for fitness idea. Let's look behind the nutritionally adequate diet -- the Type A meal pattern -- the special milk program. Let's look behind the food consumption approach at its basic assumption. The assumption --- the take-it-for-granted part -- is that the food is there. The food is there to meet the nutrient requirements of every man, woman and child in this country and with plenty to spare.



And the food is there because the American farmer put it there. He can give us anything we say we need, want and can use and in any quantities we specify. The so-called farm problem has been with us for a lot of years and is apt to be around for quite a while longer. A bruising battle rages almost every year over one aspect or another of farm programs -- primarily because in our highly developed, sophisticated agricultural economy it is difficult to strike the delicate balance between too much of one thing and not enough of another. The individual farmer and his contribution to your well-being tend to get lost in the shuffle. Cuss the problem, the government, anything you want -- but not the farmer. Don't even cuss the high cost of food -- look at the figures compared with what has happened to other items in your budget. And while you're at it -- don't forget to deduct the price of the soaps, shoes and sealing wax you're quite apt to buy in the local supermarket and charge to your food bill.

Now, as I said, the food consumption approach is established. It puts to work these abundances you have been discussing and will be discussing. It puts them to work in a solid, positive, gratifying way.

Let's look at the components of the food consumption approach. Let's look at your job. I am not going to congratulate you. I am not going to talk about the millions benefiting from these programs or the thousands of box-cars of foods you use or whether you can reach the moon six or ten times with empty milk cartons from the special milk program.

I'm going to talk about the job still to be done -- and it's a dilly. I feel sorry for those of you who are school administrators. You've been under the gun for quite a spell now and tonight is no exception. Suddenly American

parents decided Johnny couldn't read, spell, count -- couldn't do anything but learn to drive a car at school. Naturally, this was all your fault. Given the fabulous raw material of each parent's child, it was clearly and obviously your task to turn out a Nation of scientific and engineering geniuses, Aristotles and Platos. Years of abundance and apathy didn't product the classrooms, teachers, the tools you needed in order to teach Johnny -- but never mind -- it's still your fault. There has to be a goat -- a fall guy -- when a sputnik shakes the citizen to his socks and you were it.

Tonight I am going to ask you what you have done with the school lunch program. I know some programs are excellent, some good, some bad or indifferent. It depends on you. You set the tone of all your programs. You set the tone in the cafeteria as well as the classroom. Do you put the cafeteria and the classroom together? Do you use your cafeteria as more than a breadline? Do you teach your children what they should eat and why? Do you show your children where their food comes from and how it is produced and tell them about the people who produce it? What do you do about recruiting, training, staffing and paying your personnel? Many phases of this program now demand fully qualified and trained professional people.

Even more important, I want to discuss with you the implications of the school lunch legislation now pending in Congress. We hope to give you a legislative framework and the necessary appropriation to grow on. As conditions developed, the original School Lunch Act tended to stifle initiative except for the dedicated. Since improved participation resulted only in spreading the Federal money thinner, why bother? I want to impress upon you that we in the Congress who are friends of the program are not satisfied with the uneven way

in which the program has moved. Too many children were by-passed. Too many thousands in city schools and in small rural schools do not benefit. Where is the initiative and imagination that characterized this program in the beginning? We are going to make it possible for you to exercise those dormant abilities. We want to set a goal for you -- wherever humanly possible, we want every child in this country to have access to the program. It won't be easy. We've already traveled a good part of the easy route. The program has grown -- we've got stacks of statistics to prove it. From here on out the road will be bumpy.

I know it wasn't easy to administer the Special Commodities Assistance Program and only a relatively few places took advantage of it. Certainly we barely touched the fringe of the tremendous group of children who can use a lunch program. Not only can use it, but need it, really need it. We are going to do something about this situation and we need your advice as to the best way to go about it.

The direction is set. It is one part of a much larger direction. We now have on the books a whole group of legislative acts that look to a solution of the problem of those who are not now and have not for some time participated fully in all of America's abundance -- the Area Redevelopment Act is the major measure in this effort.

In the case of the school lunch program, I don't know whether the decision will be to concentrate on a commodity program or a combined cash and commodity program for needy children and needy schools. We need to reach these children with the whole program -- not just a feeding operation -- but the program with all its implications, its educational features.



Judging by the Special Assistance Program experience, there is one thing you can count on -- local interest and enthusiasm. This has been an interesting and encouraging experience in terms of the community awakening it evoked. When a bit of missionary zeal was applied, parents, civic organizations -- all joined in to help, to cooperate in getting the program organized.

Let's not get this program too institutionalized. Let's not just sit around and talk only to ourselves. Let's move out into the community and get them interested in these children and what you would like to do for them. This applies to the whole school lunch program and particularly to those pockets and those areas that we have ignored because it was just too much trouble to think through the problem and find a solution. As evidence of my personal, direct interest in this approach, I'd like to point to Senate Joint Resolution 211 which would designate the second week in October as National School Lunch Week and requesting an appropriate Presidential proclamation as the nucleus for a week of activities to tell the school lunch story and broaden the base of public understanding and cooperation.

I am sure you realize by now that you have become an important instrument of foreign policy. That we are exporting what we have learned to the developing areas of the world. That school attendance in a Peruvian city increased by 40 percent with the introduction of a rudimentary lunch program. We had similar reports from several Kentucky schools after the commodity assistance program was introduced.

We are obviously proud of the program and its potential. If we can do this in Peru and India and half a hundred other places around the globe, we can certainly do it here. It comes as quite a surprise in many countries

abroad that we have this sort of program. They assume that a capitalistic, materialistic society couldn't care less about the well-being of any except those deemed fit to survive in a capitalistic, materialistic society.

There is another program that comes as quite a surprise to those abroad. That is the family donation program. There is a fairly prevalent notion that if you lose your job you are left to starve in the streets. We have yet to communicate the full truth -- that Americans have always helped one another and always will. That we take care of our own even before we turn to helping those abroad. Those of you who administer the program have had a difficult eighteen months with lots of growing pains. Once President Kennedy ordered an expansion in the variety and volume of commodities it became worthwhile to find the State and local resources to organize a donation program. And everyone wanted in at the same time. There obviously existed and had existed for some time a tremendous unmet need in the field of food assistance. You have done a great and necessary job. The need is there and we shall see to it that the food is there so you may continue your efforts. I know it wasn't easy to get across the idea that these foods we are offering are far more than the left-overs from the Commodity Credit Corporation. You don't change a pattern of thinking overnight. From what I said earlier about food consumption programs I am sure you realize that this has been a deliberate effort to supplement the diets of needy and low-income families with items they can least afford -- with special emphasis on protein foods.

And, certainly, I want to express my personal satisfaction that the food stamp program seems to be working well. It has long been a favorite concept of mine and of others in the Congress. We have wanted to see it in operation again for many years. Studies had shown that very low income groups would



up-grade their diets if they had additional income for food. Within the general population, this was the group that really wanted to buy more of the protective foods -- more meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. This was an untapped market for the farmer -- an untapped market for the kinds of foods that are essential for good nutrition and at the same time yield a relatively greater return to the farmer. It was also, in fact, a non-existent market because these people couldn't afford to pay the market price. Middle-income and upper-income families by and large get about as much of the protective foods as they need and want --- that inelastic stomach again. Low-income families can't and don't. By freezing the normal level of food expenditure, you can assure that your food subsidy, or bonus coupons go for more and better food.

This approach has many attractive features. People eat better. The bonus coupons represent net new cash inflow in areas of the country that can use it. The program uses normal commercial channels of trade. Participants make their own choice in the grocery store with very few limitations on what they can buy in the way of food products.

Nevertheless, the program is still in the experimental phase. The President has announced an expansion but only a handful of areas scattered over the country will be participating by the end of fiscal year 1963. How far the program may be extended over the next few years remains to be seen. Even if it continues to go well this year, any expansion beyond this point will be gradual. There are many situations it is not designed to meet. In any event, we will need to maintain the commodity distribution program for schools, institutions, for short-term or temporary difficult economic conditions, for use in natural disasters and as a basic civil defense measure. There may well be many areas of the country that will prefer the commodity donation approach

because it is flexible and adaptable to a variety of situations. The food stamp program, on the other hand, is intended to meet a continuing need for food assistance. Regular participation is essential if the program is to meet its objectives.

Although it is still a bit short of midnight, I'll let you go home. As I said, I do like to talk about the food consumption programs. The programs that make it possible for all Americans to sup at the same table.

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These programs, as a group, now are firmly established in our American structure. They have had an interesting development and, as Charlie Murphy said earlier today, they may now be considered a family of programs -- a family of food consumption programs.

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It has been a pleasure being here with you this evening. I enjoy talking about our food consumption programs, especially to you who are directly involved with them. I know you will continue to work as hard as you have in the past in contributing to the success of these programs. We all are grateful to you.



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