

This country in its wisdom created national nutrition standards and created the School Hot Lunch Program. It also created another requirement that I am proud of. It is the requirement that says poor children in this country will get free school lunches.

There ought not be anyone in this Chamber and there ought not be anyone who disagrees with the basic assumption that it is our responsibility to give free school lunches to poor children. If we cannot, by looking into the eyes of children, understand the dimensions of a public policy that would withhold food from children who are hungry, what on Earth can we do that is constructive in this body?

I am hoping, when the product—that says in effect that we do not care about poor children and that there is no national requirement here—is sent to us by the House of Representatives under the Contract With America, that all of us have the willingness to stand here in the Senate and say, we disagree; poor children matter, America's kids matter.

Let me use a couple of quotes just to show you how those who push this Contract With America have changed. In 1982, the current Speaker of the House cosponsored a resolution written by then-Representative Carl D. Perkins that expressed the sense of the Congress "that the Federal Government should retain primary responsibility for the child nutrition programs and such programs should not be included in any block grant."

Well, here we are, turning 180 degrees, running the other direction, saying, Let us just eliminate the requirement. Let us roll it into a block grant. Roll it all together and ship it back to the States so you can have 50 different standards. Maybe one State would say it is not a standard that they care about. Maybe a dozen States would say they do not have the money to feed poor children. Does this country not care about that? I think that is not the case.

I think it would be a tragic mistake for us to decide in this body that what is really important in the Contract With America is to build star wars or to give tax cuts to the wealthiest among us, but it is not important to feed hungry children.

I know that when I go back to my office, I will get calls from someone watching C-SPAN saying that this is not what the contract says. But you had better believe this is what it says, and it is what the House of Representatives is trying to do. If you decide that we should eliminate the national requirement that poor children get free school lunches, then that is exactly what some mean to do.

At least from my standpoint, I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will say that this makes no sense for this country. It ignores America's children and it retreats on a national standard that makes eminently good sense. Children matter. Hungry chil-

dren must have access to free school lunches. It matters to all of us in this country to see that is done.

This is a fight and a discussion that I am anxious to have in the coming weeks when this bill comes to the Senate, because this proposal is something that we should change.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. DASCHLE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STEVENS). The minority leader is recognized.

CHILD NUTRITION

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, let me commend the distinguished Senator from North Dakota for his eloquent remarks just now and identify with them. The Senator from North Dakota commented about the Contract With America and its ramifications on school children.

What I think some of our colleagues forget is that we have had a contract in this country for a long time with our school children. At the heart of that contract is an understanding about the important role that nutrition plays in educating children today.

Our contract with school children grew out of our experience in World War II, when large numbers of young men were unable to serve in the military because of nutrition-related childhood illnesses.

At the same time, many children were coming to school malnourished, and because of that, they were unable to learn; and because they were unable to learn, they were unable to become productive citizens.

So even back in the 1940's, Americans recognized the direct relationship between nutrition and healthy development and learning. We also recognized that what happens in the lunchroom affects what happens in the classroom.

In 1946 President Truman signed the National School Lunch Act—not as a matter of charity but as a matter of national security.

What an cruel irony it would be, Mr. President, if in order to prevent our children from inheriting a huge debt tomorrow, we would take away their meals today.

Yet that is exactly what some of our colleagues would now have us do.

We cannot allow that to happen. Either way, whether we saddle our children with debt tomorrow or rob them of their lunch today, we are jeopardizing their future, and that is wrong.

Let us learn from history. The strength of our Nation is not measured only by armaments. It is also measured by the health and education of our children.

Talk to the teachers who teach our children. Talk to the men and women who run the school cafeterias and make their lunches. Talk to the parents who depend on those lunches to make sure their children are adequately nourished. They will tell you.

The reality is that a lot of kids, even today, come to school hungry. The re-

ality is that many of them don't get enough to eat at home and, if it weren't for the School Lunch Program, they would be too malnourished to learn.

So, Mr. President, this goes beyond simply a matter of nutrition. If we deprive children of a balanced meal, we risk depriving them of their ability to learn and become productive citizens.

What a terrible mistake it would be if, in our attempts to reduce the national debt, we increased our nutritional debt to our children. What a terrible mistake it would be if, in attempting to brighten our future, we forgot our past.

We understood in Harry Truman's time the critical role nutrition plays in children's physical and intellectual development. For nearly 50 years, we have acknowledged the direct link between nutrition and education, and between education and the ability to be productive citizens.

When Americans think about cutting government and redtape, taking food out of the mouths of children is not what they have in mind.

This is a provision of the Contract With America, Mr. President, that I hope will be short-lived. It denigrates the commitment we have made to children, to their education and to their future.

As the distinguished Senator from North Dakota has indicated, I hope that we will recognize the fallacies of this shortsighted proposal and retain in this Congress and in Congresses to come a genuine commitment to America's children and their well-being.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. COATS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

THE BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, we are approaching perhaps one of the most historic moments in the history of the Congress, when tomorrow this Senate will vote on the balanced budget amendment. We have not had an opportunity to pass a balanced budget amendment of this magnitude since my tenure in the Congress, and I doubt this century. We are very, very close—perhaps only one vote away. I think it is important for the Senate to understand, and for Senators to consider, just how critical it is that we bring to a final resolution this now 4-week-long debate on the necessity of a balanced budget.

I went back and grabbed a copy of the General Accounting Office report to the Congress, written in 1992, to review what their conclusions in a study entitled "Prompt Action Necessary to Avert Long-Term Damage to the Economy."

I will just cite a couple of items from their conclusion. They said, "Failure