REMARKS OF
THE HONORABLE MIKE CASTLE
FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP
CHILD NUTRITION LEGISLATION
JUNE 4, 1998

Today we will markup legislation making important changes to our nation's child nutrition programs.

I am pleased we have been able to work out many of our differences between Subcommittee and Full Committee markup. I would like to thank Congressman Martinez, Congresswoman Woolsey, and Chairman Riggs and their staff for working with us to reach a bipartisan agreement on this important legislation. I also want to thank those individuals in the nutrition community and the U. S. Department of Agriculture who spent many long hours working with us towards the development of this legislation. I realize we have not addressed everyone's concerns, but I believe we have a good bill that will go a long way towards improving our nation's child nutrition programs by:

* reducing red tape and bureaucracy,
* fighting and punishing fraud and abuse,
* giving program providers more flexibility,
* ensuring our nation's children have access to healthy meals in school, in child care settings, and during summer months, and
* giving low-income pregnant women access to nutritious foods and nutrition education throughout their pregnancy.

And most importantly, it does all of this in a revenue neutral manner. Every program modification is paid for, with offsets from within the nutrition programs.

I will be offering an amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3874, making changes to the WIC Program, which will include the provisions of H.R. 3871, amending the Summer Food Service Program, H.R. 3872, extending the Commodity program and H.R. 3873, extending State Administrative Expenses provisions.

It will also incorporate a number of amendments to other nutrition programs agreed to by House Democrats, USDA and nutritional organizations;

* provisions providing snacks to children participating in after school programs with an education or enrichment purpose;

* provisions allowing schools to operate seamless school-based nutrition programs, and

* changes to current law providing for a small, carefully constructed universal school breakfast demonstration project subject to appropriations.

I would like to highlight what I believe to be some of the key provisions of this legislation.

The first provision deals with the provision of snacks to children in after school care programs. I share the concern of many Members in this body with respect to juvenile crime that occurs between the hours school ends and their parents return home from work. Beyond crime, unsupervised youth may be involved in other undesirable behaviors, such as using drugs or alcohol, smoking, or engaging in sexual activity.

Many families indicate that they would like their children to be involved in structured activities after school, but they simply cannot find affordable options. Many schools and communities are seeking to address these problem by setting up after school programs with an educational or enrichment purpose. Helping schools, and organizations operating in high poverty areas, provide a snack to children through age 18 enrolled in these programs appears to me to be an acceptable expansion of current nutrition programs that provide meals/supplements to kids up to age 12. This added incentive may tip the balance in favor of schools and organizations establishing such programs to keep kids off of the streets. I believe that this provision will contribute to efforts to reduce juvenile crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and teen pregnancy.

Another important provision in the legislation recognizes how hard private, nonprofit organizations have worked to overcome their past history of abuse and operate quality Summer Food programs to provide meals to children during the summer months when school is not in session. Consequently, we lift additional

restrictions on their participation in the Summer Food Service Program, thereby allowing them to serve more low income children.

Under the WIC Program, key provisions address concerns which have been raised about fraud and abuse in the WIC Program and provide additional flexibility to States in addressing the needs of WIC participants. These provisions include:

* Disqualifying WIC vendors who have been convicted of trafficking in WIC food instruments, or the sale of firearms, ammunition, explosives, or drugs in exchange for WIC food instruments;

* Requiring individuals to be physically present in order to be certified for the WIC program benefits;

* Requiring WIC participants to have income documentation;

* Requiring states to take into consideration the prices stores charge for WIC foods in relation to prices charged by other stores in making vendor selections. And, requiring states to use procedures to insure participating vendors do not raise prices after they have been selected for participation.

* Allowing states to keep any collections and recoveries from fraud and abuse for use no later than the federal fiscal year following recovery.

* Raising the maximum fine for embezzlement, willful misapplication, stealing or obtaining by fraud of funds, assets or property that are of a value of $100 or more under WIC from $10,000 to $25,000.

These are but a few of the highlights of the child nutrition legislation we are considering today. As I stated at the outset, this is a good bipartisan bill which will strengthen the child nutrition programs, and I encourage my colleagues to give it their support.