



COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION & LABOR  
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE  
STATEMENT

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**Opening Statement of Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID), Republican Leader**  
**Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services**  
**“Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service”**  
**June 23, 2022**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Committee Republicans understand the importance of ensuring children are well fed during the school day and we recognize the importance of reaching students that are truly in need with the benefits of school-provided nutrition programs. However, as we exit this pandemic, creating permanent changes to school nutrition programs without first determining if such changes are needed is nonsensical. Before these programs are reauthorized, we need to validate which aspects of these programs work and which don't.

"The majority party has used the pandemic as a springboard to expand federal control (thereby increasing spending) into seemingly every aspect of American life including school lunch programs. Prior to the pandemic, child nutrition programs provided approximately 30 million lunches and 14 million school breakfasts every school day. And the need to assess these programs in the 'post-pandemic' era remains.

"We saw Congress and the previous administration move quickly to help ensure needy students had access to food and did not miss a meal. But we need to make sure these programs move forward under normal operation. Taxpayer funds should be used to help students in real need. Allowing wealthy families to take advantage of school lunch programs is not a responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Instead, we should look for ways to strengthen the programs by learning the lessons of the pandemic from people operating under the nutrition program's rules.

"There should be concentrated efforts from USDA, states, and schools to help parents transition back to regular operations including the filling out of applications to determine free and reduced price eligibility.

"This also means not over burdening the programs with new challenges. Once again, the administration is looking to overhaul the meal pattern regulations with more federal control. The last time the Secretary did this the final rule added billions in taxpayer expenses to schools and led to such significant challenges that some of the requirements had to be waived just to make the programs work. It's just not right to increase costs, add complexity, or pursue pet projects. This should be a time the USDA should to listen to the local folks on the ground and learn from the challenges the pandemic taught us.

"We're also concerned about the administration's recent Title IX guidance. We are concerned the administration plans to hold school lunch programs hostage unless schools capitulate to controversial gender policies. Boys and girls get hungry. As school nutrition relates to the gender; that's the only guideline we need. The nutrition of children should not be used as a tool to advance the Biden administration's progressive agenda.

"This all underscores why we need more transparency from the administration about how this new guidance will apply to nutrition programs, and how it will impact faith-based providers participating in the programs. The Biden administration has already targeted faith-based entities in other areas, and I would hate to see children suffer because of this administration's vindictive and biased policies.

"Lastly, this administration must insert some common-sense intelligence into the baby formula shortage issue, or at least get out of the way of the market. For the week of May 22-29, the out-of-stock rate for baby formula was 73.5 percent. Yes, that's 73.5 percent. In America. For baby formula. These are not rocket components or microprocessors, its baby formula. This is unacceptable. If we can't solve this problem, heaven help us on issues with complexity.

"Parents and caregivers across the country shouldn't have to wake up in the morning not knowing if they are going to be able to feed their babies. USDA doesn't have control over the FDA, but it is imperative the administration and its agencies work together to solve it.

"I am glad we were able to pass H.R. 7791, the bipartisan Access to Baby Formula Act, but this bill alone will not solve the crisis. We must secure our baby formula supply chains so this never happens again. In the meantime, this Committee would like to hear from the Biden administration on how this crisis has impacted WIC participants. Americans need answers."

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