

Dear Mrs. Dabney:

Thank you for contacting me regarding the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (S. 3307). I appreciate having the benefit of your views on this important matter.

As you know, the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (P.L. 79—396) and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (P.L. 89—642) were enacted to assist state educational agencies in meeting the nutritional needs of our nation's children. Under the provisions of P.L. 79—396 and P.L. 89—642, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service is responsible for administering federal subsidies for school lunch and breakfast services provided to participating schools in the form of reimbursements for serving low-cost or free meals to children. Additionally, P.L. 89—642 established the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to provide federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for certain low-income pregnant and postpartum women, and for children under age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

S. 3307 would reauthorize childhood nutrition programs established by P.L. 79—396 and P.L. 89—642, including the WIC program, for an additional five years. Furthermore, S. 3307 would dedicate an additional \$4.5 billion over the next ten years toward alleviating hunger and providing nutritious meals to youth. Funding would be used to expand the afterschool meals program, improve the automatic enrollment process for eligible low-income children, qualify foster children for school meal benefits, and improve children's access to meals during the summer.

Childhood obesity is a growing concern, and I support providing assistance to the neediest Americans in a responsible manner that discourages unhealthy eating habits. S. 3307 contains several key provisions to enable schools and child care providers to provide healthier meals to children. Notably, this legislation requires the Secretary of Agriculture to elevate nutrition requirements for snack foods and drinks sold in school vending machines. S. 3307 also requires schools to meet robust nutrition guidelines in order to receive a performance-based increase in the federal reimbursement rate for school lunches.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, I joined my colleagues in unanimously supporting the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on March 24, 2010. However, during committee deliberations, concerns were raised about the source of funds used to increase the school nutrition budget under this legislation. While I am pleased that tax increases were never considered a viable option to pay for this legislation, I am concerned that Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act reduces the budget for the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in order to pay for the nutrition increases. This conservation program is used by Texas ranchers and farmers to meet federal environmental mandates. To preserve EQIP, I supported an amendment offered by the committee's Ranking Member, Senator Saxby Chambliss that would instead reduce the budget for the Conservation Stewardship Program. Unfortunately, this amendment was defeated by a vote of 10—11. You may be certain that I will continue to urge preservation of funding for the EQIP program as these matters are discussed.

I appreciate having the opportunity to represent the interests of Texans in the United States Senate. Thank you for taking the time to contact me.

Sincerely,  
JOHN CORNYN  
United States Senator