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Nothing is more poignant than the photograph of a starving child. We see, and we weep. And we make a contribution to the charity that is seeking to help. Children all over the world, weakened by hunger, are made more susceptible to disease, and have fewer opportunities for education, employment and a healthy life.

But hunger is not just a phenomenon across the sea. There are hungry men, women and children in the United States, in Montana, in Great Falls. There are public and private safety nets in place. But still there are people who fall between the cracks. And many of them are children, our country's future. Children are more vulnerable than adults, especially young children. Their brains are still forming. Serious deprivation of essential nutrition can affect them forever, as surely as fetal alcohol, disease or genetic mutations.

Forty percent of children enrolled in the Great Falls public schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Statewide, 42.5% of school children are eligible for reduced or free lunch programs. The needs of these children do not go away when the school year ends. Last summer there were 8 sites across Great Falls that provided meals to eligible children in the summer. This summer there are only 3. And yet there are more children in need.

There are programs to help feed the hungry. In addition to the private and religiously-funded efforts (in Great Falls, FISH, Helping Hands, Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, St. Ann's Kitchen, and more), there are government programs that target hunger. And one of them, the Child Nutrition Act, is about to expire. It funds, among other things:

WIC	After School Snack and Meal Program
School Lunch Program	WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program
School Breakfast Program	Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program
Child and Adult Care Food Program	Special Milk Program
Summer Food Service Program	

Nobody is in favor of kids going hungry. This isn't a partisan issue. But it is an issue that needs advocates. The Administration is asking for \$10 billion over the next ten years, to raise meal reimbursements by 6 cents, and to incorporate more eligible children into the school lunch and supplemental feeding programs. The House version of the bill request, instead, \$8 billion dollars. And the Senate bill trims it down to \$4.5 billion.

Montanans care about our children. We care about all children. Along with other leaders of faith communities, I encourage readers to make the elimination of childhood hunger a high priority. Give generously and volunteer with charities that feed the hungry, help to establish summer feeding sites for the children who are not served, by contacting [www.summerfood.usda.gov](http://www.summerfood.usda.gov). And most of all, contact Senators Baucus and Tester, and Representative Rehberg and tell them that Montanans want the Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Act to be funded at the \$10 billion level that the administration has asked for. We cannot afford to let our children go hungry.