

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)
On Passage Of The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act
August 5, 2010**

Mr. President, today the Senate has taken a lengthy stride toward improving the health of America's children and addressing two of the greatest threats to their wellbeing and security: hunger and obesity. By passing the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to reauthorize Federal child nutrition programs, we will be making an historic investment in our children's future and in the Nation's future. With others in this body, I have pressed for action on this bill before the Senate completed its business this week. I am pleased that the Senate and our leaders made this bill the priority that our children deserve it to be.

I have heard from countless Vermont parents, teachers, school administrators, food service workers, community leaders, farmers and others about the importance of making sure every child in America has access to nutritious meals at school. They all want what's best for our children, and they all know how crucial it is that we have passed this legislation today.

In March of this year, more than four months ago, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee unanimously approved this bipartisan bill, upon which our Chairman and Ranking Member have worked so hard. Today's action has come just in time, as the September 30 deadline to reauthorize these programs is quickly approaching. Without action today, I have been concerned that we would have been forced into another long-term extension of these vital programs, sidelining the tremendous improvements that the Agriculture Committee has been working on for months.

I am grateful for Chairman Lincoln and Ranking Member Chambliss for all that they have done to ensure that we could pass this bipartisan bill. Our First Lady also deserves credit for the impetus that has helped propel our efforts forward. She has vigorously and ably taken up the cause of solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation, so that kids born today can reach adulthood at healthy weights. The groundbreaking legislation that the Senate has passed today will bring fundamental changes to our schools and will improve the food options available to our children.

When the first national school lunch program was created in 1946, children in this country were plagued with malnutrition from not having enough of the proper nutrients for health, growth and development. At the time it was considered a matter of national security to safeguard the health and well being of our nation's children. That was a far different era in the health of our Nation, but the importance of these programs and the children they help has not diminished. Unfortunately, the health statistics for children in this country today are troubling; in fact one in five children in this country is considered obese.

Thankfully this bill will help to put those children on the road to healthier, more productive and longer lives. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act establishes for the first time, ever, national school nutrition standards to ensure our children have healthier options available throughout the entire school day. With this legislation, parents across the country will know that the snacks and

foods offered to their children at school, even the vending machine and a la carte lunch line options, are based on national standards established by USDA to ensure healthier diets.

I believe that our school cafeterias should be treated as an extension of the classroom and as an opportunity for students to learn about nutrition, well-balanced meals, and where their food comes from. I thank the Chairman for including funding for the Farm to School program, which is a proven, common-sense, community-driven approach to improve the health and wellbeing of children while supporting our local farmers and economy. My goal in authoring the Farm to School program was the powerful logic of this two-for-one opportunity to get money into the hands of American farmers for their locally grown products, while supporting local economies and teaching kids about nutritious foods and where they come from. Vermont is leading the country in this effort, and I hope other states will be able to learn from our experiences as they incorporate more local and healthy foods into their cafeterias.

It is a sad reality that hunger is a regular part of life for far too many children in America today, and for many children, the meals they get at school are sometimes the only things they will eat all day. In Vermont one in ten people live in food insecurity, and many of these are our most vulnerable, our children. In addition to increasing reimbursement rates and streamlining the nutrition programs to make them easier for families to utilize, this legislation also improves summer and afterschool meal programs.

I again thank the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee for doing a remarkable job with this legislation. Their hard work and dedication, and that of their staff, have resulted in a bill that makes a historic investment in the future of this country.

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