

**NATIONAL COMMISSION ON HUNGER TESTIMONY HEARINGS
EL PASO, TEXAS — FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2015**

***TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT OF MR. SALVADOR BALCORTA, CEO
CENTRO DE SALUD FAMILIAR LA FE***

“SI EL CORAZÓN HABLARA (IF THE HEART COULD SPEAK),” BY SALVADOR BALCORTA

**SI EL CORAZÓN HABLARA
HOW MANY OF US
WOULD SIT AND LISTEN
TO THE SORROW
THE HURT
THE ANGUISH
THE PAIN
THE PALPATATION
THAT QUICKENS
UNTIL IT GOES
INSANE?**

HOW MANY OF US WOULD SIT AND LISTEN?

CUANTOS DE NOSOTROS

ESCUCHARIAMOS

LA PASIÓN?

THE PASSIONATE PLEA

TO LET US BE

TO LET US SEE

AN INJUSTICE

BECOME JUSTICE

AN INEQUALITY

BECOME EQUALITY

A DISHONOR

BECOME HONOR

A DEATH

BECOME LIFE?

HOW MANY OF US

WOULD SIT AND LISTEN

TO A CRY OF SORROW

TO A CRY OF FIGHT

TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT!!

**CUANTOS DE NOSOTROS
ESCUCHÁRIAMOS
AL CORAZÓN
GRITAR UN GRITO
DE ANGUSTIA
QUE ASUSTA
HASTA SI MISMO**

**UN GRITO
DE GUERRA
QUE CORRE
Y PALPITA
QUE SE LLENA
DE EMOCIÓN
QUE TRANSMITE
UNA PASIÓN
QUE SE SALE PARA FUERA**

**UN GRITO
DE GUERRA
THAT LEAPS
AND REAPS
YOUR OWN HEART
Y TE HACE LLORAR
PORQUE NO PUEDES NEGAR
LA INJUSTICIA
EL DESHONOR
EL ENGAÑO
EL DESRESPECTO
A NUESTRA GENTE
Y LA FUENTE DE NUESTRO VIVIR
CALLS FOR WAR
A CHORE
MOST OF US
WOULD RATHER
PUT ASIDE**

**THE INJUSTICE
THE INEQUALITY
THE DISHONOR
THE DEATH
THAT WE MUST FACE**

**IF THE HEART SPOKE
HOW MANY OF US
WOULD SIT
AND LISTEN
TO AN ANGRY
ANGRY
HEART**

Buenos Dias. Good Morning.

As you can see we're not really here to talk to you about hunger.

You've heard a lot about hunger. At La Fe we've been talking about hunger for 48 years. We've been talking to Congress for 48 years.

We've been talking to the different legislators, not only in Texas, but around this country, about hunger and the other things that poor communities lack.

At La Fe we talk about *Nuestro Bienestar*, we talk about our total wellness. We talk about how the categorical, dysfunctional system that we live in, that we have to abide to in this country, where we talk about health and nothing else.... Where we talk about education and nothing else.... Where we talk about hunger and nothing else... as if each one were to lead a separate life... when we know that all of them are intermingled.

All of them are one.

You get funding for education and God forbid you use it for health. You get funding for health and God forbid you use it for housing.

One of the first recommendations from La Fe would be that it is time for this government and this system to get away from that categorical funding and to understand that when people live in poverty, it isn't just hunger that affects them.

Let me make it very clear that we're talking about hunger. And this isn't meant to be impolite or disrespectful. But why do we have to change or label

things? When we talk about hunger, you go out and talk to our communities, you go out and talk to our barrios, you go out and talk to our ghettos about “food insecurity” and they’re going to look at you and say, “What the Hell are you talking about?”

So why do we do that? Why? And then we get consultants that get up upset when they start hearing someone like me talking? And they show it to you with their body language! So if you come from the barrio, or you come from the street, or you come from the gangs, and someone is showing you with their body language, “What is this guy talking about?! I’m a consultant! I’m earning a lot of money and he’s here being impolite!”

Well, you’re being impolite.

You know, we run a charter school. I don’t know if you went to see the charter school. It’s just across the street. We’ve attempted to create a campus environment for our barrio. We have an adult clinic. We have a geriatric clinic. We have a child and adolescent wellness center. We have an adult basic education school. We teach GED. We teach English. We teach citizenship.

Believe it or not, as you hear me and as you hear me talk about how our system has neglected us, and how our system has failed us, we’re as patriotic as the next person.

We love America! Our people have shed their blood for this country. You know, when I’m in Washington, DC and some of the right wingers and some of the conservative Republicans, and even sometimes some of the conservative

Democrats, come up to me and say, “Wow, that’s kind of harsh! You know freedom is not free!”

Hell, who better knows that freedom is not free than the Chicano community, or the Hispano community, or the Latino community, or the Mexico-Americano community, whatever you want to call us.

If you research, you’ll find Latino names from the War of Independence on. If you mark our numbers in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, percentagewise we have more numbers than any other community.

So we know freedom is not free. Our ancestors, together with the Black community, and the Chinese community, and some of the other color communities laid the railroad track from the East to the West coast. They gave their lives laying those railroad tracks to unite the United States.

Our people continue to shed their blood. And when I say our people it’s mostly Latino, Hispano, Mexicano people in the fields. They’re the ones bringing in the crops. They’re the ones that bring the fruits. They’re the ones that bring the vegetables to our tables so that we can eat. And guess what? They don’t eat. They don’t eat!

You want to tell Congress something? You tell Congress that it’s time for them be equal. That it’s time for them to let us come to the table and sit at the table. But you need to stand up and be harsh. You need to stand up and be forceful.

You need to tell [Speaker of the United States House Rep. John] Boehner and his people that it’s time for them to start representing us and start doing

legislation, and start doing what they're supposed to do, not playing little games.... Not trying to knock every piece of legislation that the President of the United States brings up.

Not showing their internal racism.

Because I don't care what people say. A lot of the stuff that's going on in America today isn't because the President is too liberal. It's because the President is a man of color and we can't stand that. We cannot stand that in this country.

And all of that is tied into hunger. We still do not get represented the way we should. Everybody yells out and everybody is so happy that we've become the largest minority in this country. But what good does it us if we're the poorest community, if we're the least educated community?... If we're the community that works the most and yet earns the least?

You talk about hunger? We're the hungriest element in the country. We're not represented. Just look across your table. Look at each other. I don't want to disrespect anybody but which one of you is Hispanic? Which one?

Why is there not even one Hispanic or even one Black in your commission?

It would be nice, it would be even better, to get somebody who has gone through the hunger, right? Not just read about it? Again, I don't want to disrespect any of you, because maybe some of you have grown up poor.

But let me tell you what I tell my staff.

What I tell my staff is that we might have been hungry. But just like a boxer, you just remember the hunger. You just remember the pain. It's really different from feeling it at the moment.

I think I've gotten my point across. We can talk about statistics all we want. We can talk about numbers. We've got a lot of numbers. We've got a lot of percentages.

What we need is for somebody to stand up before Congress and say, "this is what the people are saying."

“SE MUERE OTRO NIÑO (ANOTHER CHILD DIES),” BY SALVADOR BALCORTA

**SE MUERE OTRO NIÑO
SE MUERE OLVIDADO
POR FALTA DE DINERO
LA VIDA SE LA HA ROBADO**

**A CHILD DIES
FORGOTTEN
WITHOUT MONEY
WITHOUT FOOD
ENDURANCE
DIDN'T CUT IT**

**ANOTHER CHILD DIES
HE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE
AND IN THIS DAY AND AGE
IT REALLY MAKES NO SENSE**

**ANOTHER CHILD DIES
HE DIES FORGOTTEN
HAY VA OTRO NINO
YA LO VAN A ENTERRAR
Y LA POBRE DE SU MADRE
NO PUEDE NI LLORAR
ANOTHER CHILD DIES
AND I CAN HEAR THE CRIES
THE PAIN
THE SCREAMS OF HURT
LOS GRITOS DE DOLOR
LOS LLANTOS DE FAMILIA
AL PERDER UN DULCE AMOR**

**ANOTHER CHILD DIES
AND I CAN HEAR THE CRIES
A COMMUNITY REACTING
AND QUESTIONING THE LIES**

**A CHILD THAT WAS REFUSED
THE SIMPLEST OF
THE SIMPLE
AND ONE CAN'T
EVEN CRY
AS WE BID
A SAD GOODBYE**

**ANOTHER CHILD DIES
AND I CAN HEAR THE CRIES
A COMMUNITY REACTING
AND QUESTIONING
THE LIES**

**SE MUERE OTRO NIÑO
Y LA COMUNIDAD RESPONDE
YA NO SE ESCONDE
PIDE RESPETO
UNA SIMPLE DIGNIDAD
PIDE SUS DERECHOS
A LA FAMOSA IGUALDAD**

**A CHILD DIES
HAVING BEEN REFUSED
ABUSED
BY A SYSTEM'S NEGLECT
FOR LIFE**

**A CHILD DIES
FORGOTTEN
WITHOUT MONEY
WITHOUT FOOD
ENDURANCE DIDN'T CUT IT
ANOTHER CHILD DIES
HE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE
AND IN THIS DAY AND AGE
IT REALLY MAKE NO SENSE**

If I speak to you harshly today, if I speak to you in a rough way, it's because almost 45 years ago my granddad was my father figure. The best way I can describe him was an "Archie Bunker" Mexican-American. "America. Love it or Leave it!"

So when his grandson became a leftist, militant, radical, you can imagine how it was. You know, my granddad said, "I can understand what you guys are angry about, what you guys are yelling about. I can understand what you guys are protesting. But son, you're 16 years old. You need to learn to have patience."

It's been 45 years. The patience has kind of run thin. We're tired. Tired. Like most of the communities of color in this country, we ask you if you do anything — whether you're red or you're blue — you need to stand up and tell Congress, "Enough is enough!"

Muchas Gracias.

COMMISSIONER JEFFERY EVERETT: "Thank you Mr. Balcorta. That was very passionate. I think it brings to mind how much weight we carry. I appreciate your words."

MR. BALCORTA: "I've been in commissions. I know how it is to be the messenger."

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: "Right."

MR. BALCORTA: “So by no means are we criticizing you guys. We’re criticizing the men up on the hill. Those of you, who know them personally, need to rattle them and shake them a bit. Because we do that at La Fe. We do it.

We’re really proud to have only 25 percent of our funding that is government funded. Twenty-five percent.

As I’ve traveled around this country, it’s always the other way around. It’s 75 percent government funded and maybe 25 percent yours. It’s 80 percent funded. Maybe 20 percent. And maybe that’s why, in a certain way, that’s why we can stand up and speak out the way we do. We are not threatened with getting our monies cut.”

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: Thank you. Thank you.”

[Commissioner Everett yields the floor to Kathy Underhill and later addresses her. Upon finishing, the Question and Answer Portion follows]

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: “At this point we’re going to open it up to the Commission for questions.

The Commissioners have been instructed that each Commissioner will have an opportunity to ask one question. If we still have time then we will ask some additional follow-up questions. Go ahead.”

COMMISSIONER RUSSELL SYKES????: “Thank you both. I think there was a really important link between your two statements. I say that Kathy [Underhill],

because I'm a little bit familiar with what you've achieved in Colorado, which is very impressive.

And I took your comments, Mr. Balcorta, to really be a plea for Congress to act instead of just talk about this. That requires kind-of a political will that you both alluded to.

You've had some success, Kathy, at the state level in creating that political will. I wonder if you have some advice for us, or can give us just a little bit of the back story on how that might translate on a national or in a federal level . . . what strategies enabled you, for example the school breakfast legislation, that you mentioned, which was really landmark legislation. There had to be some strategies that helped raise that issue up.

KATHY UNDERHILL: "I think the first piece is us having the resolve that failure is not an option — that we're going to get this legislation passed.

We did a solid ground game, initially, to increase school breakfast, going kind school by school or district by district and had double-digit increases in participation. But we knew that to meet our goal it would take legislative action.

We began with bipartisan support of the bill. As the session devolved — as I call it, or evolved — things become more polarizing. For is. it really was about building a big tent but being really clear about what we were willing to compromise on and what we were not . . . and having data and having facts, and having people that are impacted by the issue coming to testify, and really having

legislators understand what this means to their constituents and their families, was a critical thing.

And people say Colorado is a purple state. I disagree with that. We are a red state, and we are a purple state, but we have very little purple. Red and blue. Very little purple. Does that answer?

VARIOUS COMMISSIONERS: “Yes.”

COMMISSIONER SYKES: “Mr. Balcorta, I take no umbrage of your passion and your harshness. I think even if we might disagree, we’re all a little impatient with the government’s inefficiency. I’m very impressed with the wellness approach you take here at [Centro De Salud Familiar La Fe] and wedding the issue of nutrition to health. Obviously there’s a lot of spillover effects when children have bad eating habits and become obese and diabetic. I’d like to hear a little more about how you’re trying to start a very early age to try and address those issues.”

MR. BALCORTA: In a very aggressive way, Mr. Sykes. I think, like anybody that has poor communities, it’s not only the issue of hunger that we’re having to fight, but at times the issue of indifference within some of our communities. The issue of we stand up and call for Congress to pay attention to what’s going on. But sometimes within cities, you’ve got neighbors not paying attention to what’s going on with their neighbors and not wanting to get involved.

Wellness is an issue that La Fe has been involved with, believe it or not, almost since our founding years. You know, our parents — mostly our moms —when

they wanted to take us out of the gangs, when they wanted to take us out of the violence, out of the death, out of the prison, they were wanting for us to get involved in sports, wanting for us to get involved in exercise. Boxing was like a really big thing. And that's wellness. That's preventing you from getting involved in ugly ways of life.

For us, at the [La Fe Preparatory School], for example it's been really hard. At times with the children that are obese, at times with the children that are not eating properly, all you need to do sometimes is — I'm going to get in trouble with this one —look at their parents. They're following the same route.

Therefore when we want to start to exercise the child, or want to pay attention to what he's eating during breakfast and during lunch, guess who the first ones who start getting upset at us are? It's their parents.

We decided that we need to start our education programs throughout the community And with or without the people needing it . . . getting the people following a good diet, a good wellness trek, a good exercise program, getting them to almost be promoters with their neighbors, getting them to be the initiators with their neighbors, instead of us as professionals trying to push it on them . . . getting their peers to push it.

And we've seen that wellness among peers, it's almost like a weight, let's call it a weight, that starts to be pushed among each other. And with some of our middle-aged women, it gets to be like a challenge and like a competition. There are going to be afternoons when this auditorium is full of, not only from this

neighborhood, but professionals that come in from the courthouse, or even our staff members. And that pushes a lot of influence. When our poor moms see that some other folks are coming in, to not only exercise, but to help them out, that helps us a lot with our wellness programs.

COMMISSIONER CHERIE JAMISON: “Thank you so very much for your honesty and your straightforward delivery about the things about which you dream for our children.”

MR. BALCORTA: “That’s not what my staff had written for me, OK.” [Laughter from audience and Commission Members]

COMMISSIONER JAMISON: “[Laughing] I get it. . . . Tell us a little bit about the alliance between health-care providers and Federally Qualified Health-care Centers, and the work of anti-hunger, and the government as an alliance? How do you see that? What is your vision for that kind of an alliance in this community and across the nation? You have set such a high bar here. It’s a model for other communities. And if you would talk about that a bit, please. That would be great.”

MR. BALCORTA: “We’re involved with National Council of La Raza. As a matter of fact I was part of the leadership team for National Council of La Raza for ten years before I got sick. I’ve been sick for four years. I just started to walk about four months ago. But I’ve been in a wheelchair for almost four years. And that stopped me from traveling a lot.

“But my staff goes out and travels. They’re involved with the National Association of Community Health Centers, Texas Association of Community Health Centers, National Council of La Raza, American Public Health Association ... almost all the major organizations.

“Again, there’s been a spillover from our government’s policy tank and our government’s way of thinking, in the categorical fashion, that when you go to community health-center meetings — Federally Qualified Health Center meetings — a lot of them tell you, “I don’t know why you guys are involved in all of this. We’re here to provide health and that’s it.” And when you tell them “Hunger is part of health. Housing is part of health. Education is part of health. They say, “No, we don’t want to get involved in that.”

We’ve gotten some of them to now start getting involved. In Texas we’ve got at least ten community health centers — Federally Qualified Health Centers — in San Antonio, in Houston, in Dallas, in Austin that have followed the trend.

We’ve got now community-health centers in San Isidro, California; in San Diego; in Washington, DC; in Denver; in Seattle; in Chicago ... a lot of them we’ve formed almost informal alliances, sharing with each other what we’re doing ... sharing with each other. At least three of them we’ve helped them to transition from being a neighborhood health center to becoming a Federally Qualified Health Center.

“That’s why we established the policy center in San Antonio. But man we got hit big time with just the establishment of a center outside our city. And especially

when they found out that we were going to do a policy center in San Antonio and another one in San Diego. The national organizations got a little bit, not upset, but a little bit paranoid in the sense of, “Are they trying to start a national organization?” And by no means were we trying to do that. We were just trying to see if we could share some of what we’ve been doing.”

SEVERAL COMMISSIONERS: “Thank you. Thank you Mr. Balcorta.”

COMMISSIONER DEBORAH FRANK MD: “Thank you both for those incredible testimonies. Mr. Balcorta, I want to have you help us clarify something. You have a wonderful example here of what “One-Stop-Shopping” is, as we were told as we walked around, which is a highly effective model. You talk about the problems with the categorical system. We have heard other people recommend block granting. And I don’t know if you see any dangers to that or whether that’s really what you’re talking about. But I think we need to be really clear in our recommendations. People say we should block grant SNAP. We’ve heard that. Most places we’ve heard “For goodness sakes, don’t do that!” I think it’s very important to get clarity from you.”

MR. BALCORTA: “I think, like I said with ‘hunger’ and ‘food insecurity,’ we’re just playing games with names. Block granting is just the same as categorical granting, if you stop and think about it.

It’s not to criticize the individuals who are asking for block granting. Individuals who are asking for block granting have now been so ingrained that that’s the

only way they're going to get money. They're real good at what they do. So they want to be sure that some of the money goes to them.

You've also got to also understand that as much as I criticize categorical funding and block granting, it's going to also create more of an oversight when you just allow monies to be sent in and allow people to use the monies as they need it because a lot of times you're going to have organizations that are not capable of doing that.

It's got to be done — I don't know if Ms. Underhill disagrees with that — it's got to be done in a very phased in fashion, in a very careful fashion. Believe it or not, years ago, I would criticize not-for-profits that hadn't been doing anything for 15, 20 years. The only thing that they had done is, when their children grew up, involve them as staff members, when they got married, involve their spouses as staff members . . . and that's the only way that organization had grown.

When we talk about doing away with categorical funding, as we talk about allowing organizations to build capacity, you also have to be willing to stand up and stop some of the organizations that are literally just mismanaging monies and not doing what they're supposed to.

It's a big difference to have been around 48 years and have an organization that just grew up, as opposed to having an organization that has blossomed and grown.

A lot of us grew up in this organization. Some of us started at the age of 14 in this organization. That's a long, long time. We were youth being outreach workers. We were youth being involved in community organizing. When we took over the leadership of the organization, the organization had been around for 25 years. It was one clinic, a \$3 Million budget, and 70 employees.

Well, if you take a look at that and if you truly oversee it and audit it, \$3 Million for 70 employees and for one clinic is a pretty good chunk of change. Yet [the previous La Fe administration] were asking for employees to work 1 day, four weeks out of the year for free because they weren't making it. So I don't know how that can be.

We took over that organization and today we've got a \$25 Million organization, with 22 sites, and 450 employee. It's a big difference from the first 25 years to almost the second 25 years. To answer your question, I wouldn't agree with giving out block grant monies."

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: "We have time for just one more question."

COMMISSIONER MARIANA CHILTON: Thank you very much for your testimony Mr. Balcorta and also Kathy Underhill.

Mr. Balcorta, I think the beautiful work you're doing across the state and, really, across the Southwest is a testament for why do we need to fix the systems when we have people like you and leaders like you who are investing community

dollars and doing community-oriented approaches, why should we fix the systems?

And then I'd like you to unpack for me what you really meant when you said, "the system has neglected us. The system has failed us."

What does that mean?

MR. BALCORTA: Well, first of all, it's not Balcorta. It's the team that Balcorta has put together. It's the hits that that team gets as we're talking around the country. . . sometimes, ironically, where we don't even want to show people what we've done because people leave with that idea that, "He's saying that they've been neglected, he's saying that they've been abused. He's saying that they haven't been paid attention to, and look at these beautiful buildings!"

These beautiful buildings are a really a testament to private and government [resources] coming together with the community to build something.

This building itself, we had the idea of building a child and adolescent wellness center that included three components: the wellness, the cultural, and the technology center. All of them are supposed to work together, almost create an interdisciplinary type of approach.

The whole dream hasn't come true yet. Kids are supposed to be able to come in to the computer center, swipe a card, and start talking to the computer and get connected whether they're poets, writers, dancers, artists and for that computer to talk to them about what they're doing and how it's connected to health.

That hasn't happened yet. But what I was going to say is that, I'm not religious. But I'm very spiritual. And I believe in a Father God, Tata Dios. Whether that sounds right or not... When we built this building, this building was empty. I was going all around the country trying to get money for the arts, that's connected to health, and connected to wellness . . . And guess what, everybody was looking at me like, "What's wrong with you? You can't do that."

We got an award from IBM for two computers. When the gentleman called me and said, "We're going to give you two computers but we need for you to be in the press conference so that we can show you off and so that we can say that IBM gave La Fe two computers."

I said, "That's fine." Then he said, "By the way, I need to go in and check out where you're going to put your computers." And when he came in here — and this was a shell — and he said, "where do they go?"

I said, "In this room. This is supposed to be a computer center." He said, "Oh man, let me call my supervisor." He called his supervisor in front of me and he said, "I think we need to give these guys a little bit more than two computers."

His supervisor asked him to put me on the phone. He put me on the phone and he asked me to meet him in 30 minutes. Long story short, that supervisor ended up calling his supervisor.

And then, all of the sudden, I get a call from the vice president of IBM for the state of Texas . . . Mr. Wormsley . . . And he says, “You know we’re going to give you 38 computers. But you’re going to have to be at the press conference.”

I would have been there for one computer.

He came in after the ceremony. He said, “Now, take me to the room where you’re going to put the computers.” He came in here, and again the room was still a shell. He looked at it. He said, “How many computers do you need?”

I said, “75,” and IBM gave us 75 computers.

CISCO came the next month. All of the sudden, CISCO looks at everything and they say — and this is without writing a grant, OK — “We’re going to give you enough equipment to create a CISCO academy.”

Now, as Ms. Underhill is saying, we always go big. We always ask for big money. So when the Empowerment Zone was in El Paso, and my staff was writing the grant and hearing me out on what I wanted, and I told them what I wanted, and one of my chiefs came to me and said, “Salvador, all of the centers are asking for a median of \$60,000.”

I said, “Write the grant like I told you. Ask for what I told you.”

When we went to the ceremony, the gentlemen, one of our politicians (I won’t say his name because then it’ll be on the record), Dee Margo told me, “You’re crazy. That’s too much money!”

“That’s what we need,” I said. “You didn’t put a cap on the RFP (Request For Proposal).” They voted on it and we got \$680,000. We got money for a print shop. We got money for an audio, graphic-design center.

What I’m saying is that we have had to pull teeth to get where we are. We’ve never bowed down to what we can get or what we can’t get.

We stand up. We’ve stood up in Congress for the State. We’ve stood up in some of the different commissioners’ meetings around the country. What I’m saying is that if we were just writing your traditional types of grants, we wouldn’t have what we’ve got today. Just to give you an idea.... I told you, we took over this organization with just \$3 Million. \$3Million.

You know how much we get in federal monies today? \$5.4 Million. That’s only \$2.4 Million in the past 23 years. That’s almost \$100,000 a year. What I’m saying is that if we were waiting for the federal government or the state government to give us money to do our services, we wouldn’t be doing what we’re doing.

And that’s where it’s very hard, extremely hard, for our fellow organizations around this country to get monies. We are pussycats compared to some of the friends that we’ve got in Oakland, in Philadelphia, and New York.

So when they stand up, a lot of times, people will go like, “Don’t give them the money. They’re going to use it to buy arms.”

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: Mr. Balcorta, thank you. I understand why you have over 450 staff at this point. I’m just hoping that my team here in El Paso doesn’t

defect and come over to La Fe, too. I think we all might, by the end of the day. That was fantastic”

MR. BALCORTA: Well that’s what I wanted to talk to you about later.

COMMISSER EVERETT: That’s why we’re having lunch, right?

I want to thank you both, Mr. Balcorta and Ms. Underhill. Those were very informative. I would like to ask one more thing of La Fe.

As you submit your written testimony, I would like you to address the question of what can the Federal government do to address hunger among our elderly and our disabled populations.

We had an opportunity to meet with several of your community members yesterday. Some of them are here with us. We’re glad that you are here. But if you can give us some specific recommendations that we can carry to Congress, that’ll be great. But, if you’ll just put that in your written word.

We are going to take a very, very brief break.

MR. BALCORTA: And just to interrupt you, that’s good. I don’t know if you know this, but just yesterday, the Older American Act was, again, pushed toward the next session. And that’s sad.

COMMISSIONER EVERETT: That’s right. That’s right. We’ve been too good at punting lately.

We're going to take a very brief break and allow our next guest to come to the table. Our Commissioners are going to step away and we will reconvene in five minutes. Thank you.

Recommendations to National Commission On Hunger Regarding The Elderly and Persons With Disabilities

Vulnerable populations like the elderly and community members with physical or developmental disabilities are particularly affected by our nation's hunger crisis. They often face economic struggles that place them in extreme poverty. Elderly community members and people living with disabilities often lack transportation to get them to and from food pantries or accessing their services. If they don't have access to their own vehicle, they must rely on friends with cars or the kindness of strangers.

If a food pantry is within walking distance, having a collapsible or folding shopping cart with wheels is essential. Otherwise, an elderly or person with a disability can only leave a food pantry with what they can carry in their arms — which may not be enough to get them through more than a few days.

Literature and materials that are not language or culturally appropriate and poorly trained service personnel also make it difficult for community members to feel comfort and put their trust in public-assistance/ government offices. It is important to note that not all foods will ease someone's hunger. Care must be taken that foods are culturally appropriate and acceptable. For an elderly population, or a community members who have a neuro-motor dysfunction or poor dental health, foods must be easily chewed or swallowed.

Centro De Salud Familiar La Fe (La Fe) recommends the following initiatives to address hunger challenges for the elderly, people with disabilities, and all communities affected by hunger.

HOLISTIC-WELLNESS GRANTS — Centro De Salud Familiar La Fe (La Fe) believes that hunger is best addressed in a holistic approach that combines direct hunger assistance, job training, and community empowerment.

La Fe recommends developing multi-year Holistic Wellness Grant opportunities that will allow organizations to establish programs that address a number of health and human-services goals.

The outcome of the grants should be a long-term solution to immediate family hunger and/or establishing self-sufficiency. Best practices should be another outcome so that these best practices can be replicated. Instead of the “one-size fits all” approach, the grants should be awarded to organizations that will integrate the cultural and regional needs and preferences of families.

This approach will allow organizations to focus on the sub-populations that experience hunger in their communities, usually ethnic minorities.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUNGER SOLUTIONS — La Fe recommends that once the holistic-wellness grants are fulfilled, a national conference be held that highlights these and other innovative solutions to hunger.

During the conference, grant accomplishments can also be shared with organization representatives involved in fighting community hunger so that they can compare strategies, practices, and outcomes. The conference will provide the first national symposium on solutions to community hunger where information, program strategies, and innovative approaches on nutrition, family empowerment, self-sufficiency, job development, and the many other elements that impact hunger can be shared.

Special attention will be paid to hunger’s impact, solutions, and practices for vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Reassess the Application Process for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Other Public-Assistance Programs. Numerous complaints by families who have to resort to SNAP share a common thread. Applicants often cite feeling they were treated like they are committing a criminal offense, not asking for public assistance. Applicants and SNAP recipients also frequently cite poor customer service and mistreatment by eligibility workers.

La Fe urges the development of a web-based application that community and social-services organizations can use to assist the people they already serve. These agencies are on the frontlines of human services and know their community’s needs best. After all the financial and other requirements have been met, but need to be verified, who

better to prepare SNAP or public-assistance applicants for the final, application interview and verification.

This process will save public-assistance workers' time by having host organizations collect required documentation for a process that often involves multiple visits. It will also establish a community network of organizations that people trust to initiate the sometimes degrading process of applying in insensitive government offices. This community network and application assistance process can include faith-based organizations, community non-profits, senior centers, Centers for Independent Living, and schools.

Food Vouchers as Appreciation and Promotional Tools to Ensure Compliance With Health and Other Self-care Practices — La Fe recommends using food vouchers as rewards for compliance with self-improvement, health, behavioral (e.g. substance abuse), and other self-improvement programs. These food vouchers would be issued by organizations that ask low-income persons to change or modify behaviors to improve their lives.

The food vouchers should be regulated so that outcomes can be measured and monitored. The organization issuing the voucher would become a direct food-assistance access point, and also achieve self-improvement outcomes among their clients as long-term solutions to immediate community hunger.

These food vouchers can be made available through senior centers, churches, and Centers For Independent Living to facilitate access for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Food Sharing Via The Cloud — Technology-based tools for putting perfectly good, surplus food in the hands of communities and families who need it most, and not in garbage bins, are developing worldwide.

A brief Internet search brought up more than a dozen media sites covering already developed and in-use mobile “food-cloud” apps. In essence, these apps work by allowing restaurants, catering services, businesses, etc. to quickly post what types and

quantities of surplus foods they have available at the end of their day. A charity, shelter, pantry, etc. then accepts the donation online and make arrangements for immediate pick up and distribution.

Restaurants or food businesses no longer feel compelled to throw out perfectly good food for lack of storage or refrigeration space. Schools who may be legally obligated to throw away untouched fruits, snacks, or other edibles can now donate these food items to a charity that will pick it up and get it to someone in need.

The apps can also work in reverse. Charities, shelters, churches, or senior centers can post announcements about special needs, individual, or family cases. Restaurants or food-businesses can then respond.

<http://www.cnet.com/news/feeding-forward-app-delivers-food-to-homeless-shelters-in-real-time/>

<http://fortune.com/2015/04/16/could-these-apps-solve-americas-huge-food-waste-problem/>

<http://time.com/3583520/shareable-feast/>

<http://news.berkeley.edu/2014/11/12/students-feeding-forward-app-fights-hunger-food-waste/>