

Dear Commissioners:

I attended the hearing in Portland, Maine yesterday and wanted to contribute my own observations and recommendations. I am a member of an anti-hunger organization which I will not name due to the fact that I am speaking as an individual and not as a representative of my organization. I was born and grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana and grew up witnessing extreme inequality in my city, and experienced devastation first hand after Hurricane Katrina.

You all should already know that one cannot speak of hunger with a straight face without also speaking not only of the structural violence and racism inherent in poverty but also of the problem of *wealth*. Too often in my work I hear euphemisms like “lift them out of poverty” and “anti-poverty” and “the culture of poverty,” talk of ending poverty ad-nauseum. Rarely do conversations discuss the disenfranchising effects of the culture of wealth, the ecological devastation that results from market growth and the ensuing displacements of habitats and people who will bear the burden in the form of “food and life insecurity.” Poverty will not end until gross accumulation of wealth, the myth of endless growth, and the aspiration toward the middle-class fantasy do as well. When I see poverty I am not disgusted at it but rather at the conditions that depend upon it. Our wealth and prosperity as a nation and as white middle class individuals (which most of you commissioners and myself are) depended first on the lives and labor of millions of black slaves, and depends now on black labor within our prison system and black subservience more broadly. Our prosperity also depends on maintaining a militaristic imperialist presence abroad in regions of interest. Who can take congress’ concern about hunger seriously when 55.2% of the discretionary budget and 18% of the total budget goes to the military, while only 11% of the total budget goes to safety net programs, of which SNAP is just one component?¹ That people actually complain about the cost of SNAP is enough to make one vomit. Who can take congress’ concern about childhood hunger seriously when police literally murder black children?² Finally, how outrageous it is to hear commissioner Mayhew and the panel as well concern yourselves with ‘fraud’ and ‘cheating the system’ when the system itself a rigged game built on genocide, oppression and unequal access to representation. That someone might accuse me of being dramatic would be testament to their own distance from the situation.

Obviously I think the idea of a commission on hunger is necessarily limited and any serious discussion of alleviating hunger needs to address our priorities as a nation and as global citizens. I don’t expect congress to change and I do expect that meaningful changes will come from the people here and across the world who no longer tolerate the hypocrisy and violence done to them in the name of democracy and, laughably, peace.

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Where do our federal tax dollars go?”
<http://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-where-do-our-federal-tax-dollars-go>

² The Washington Post, “Fatal Police Shootings in 2015 Approaching 400 Nationwide,”
http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/fatal-police-shootings-in-2015-approaching-400-nationwide/2015/05/30/d322256a-058e-11e5-a428-c984eb077d4e_story.html

That being said, I recommend you report to congress that SNAP be protected and remain an entitlement program; that you recommend the summer EBT allowance for families with children; that you recommend the community eligibility provision; that you discourage ABAWD mandatory work requirements and instead advocate for innovation in sustainable and public works jobs, and instead of giving credence to ‘training a workforce to meet the needs of employers’³ demand jobs that meet the needs of the public. If you can contribute to the protection of programs that do work well (the Government Accountability Office praises SNAP as being a hallmark of government efficiency)⁴ then you will have done a decent job. The scope of the problem is beyond your call to duty, and the answers lie in the mobilization of the under classes rather than the polite deliberations of your committee. I mean no insult, but I hope you all speak truth amongst yourselves and recognize my anger and anger you may have witnessed elsewhere for what it is—sadness and skepticism at the intentions and sincerity of our government.

Thank you for your time.

Emma LeBlanc

³ National Skills Coalition, “SNAP Employment and Training,”
http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/NSC_Training_SNAP_2014.pdf

⁴ New York City Coalition Against Hunger, “Top 10 Myths about SNAP,” <http://nyccah.org/learn-about-hunger/food-stamp-myths>.