

'DON'T CUT FOOD STAMPS'

BY SAM MUYSKENS, DEANN SMITH AND SANDRA LYON

An estimated 124,000 Kansas families live with hunger or the threat of hunger, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That amounts to nearly 1 in 8 families in Kansas and includes families with children, senior citizens living on fixed incomes, and low-income families with parents who work but struggle to make ends meet.

Now comes news from Washington, D.C., that Congress is considering a federal budget for next year that would make it even harder for many Kansas families to put enough food on the table every day.

Budgets being considered in the U.S. Senate and House would make major cuts in the federal food stamp program. Food stamps provide vital assistance to millions of American families.

About 170,000 Kansans are enrolled in the food stamp program; more than half of these are children. Last year, Kansans received \$158 million in food stamp benefits that they spent on food in supermarkets and grocery stores across the state.

A large reduction in food stamp funding inevitably will mean that many people will lose this crucial form of assistance. It is not

hyperbole to observe that many of these families would then face excruciating choices -- between food and medicine, food and shelter, and food and transportation.

Major reductions in food stamp spending also will force many people to seek help from states, local governments and charities. However, Kansas state and local budgets are not in a position to make up for a loss of federal funding. Our food pantries will not be able to feed all those in need.

It's not yet clear how big a cut Congress might make in food stamps, but the reduction could be substantial.

The House budget proposal would cut spending that is overseen by the agriculture committee -- including food stamps -- by \$5.3 billion over five years, while the Senate spending plan would cut such spending by \$2.8 billion. Such large reductions could include major cuts in funding for food stamps, meaning a loss of perhaps tens of millions of dollars a year now helping Kansas residents.

It's time for Kansans to speak out in support of this vital program. We urge Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., and Rep. Jerry Moran, R-Hays,

members of their respective agriculture committees, to oppose cuts to food stamps and other important nutrition programs; to lobby their colleagues to limit the final cuts to agriculture committee spending; and to reject any move to undermine the food stamp program's national guarantee through the approval of waivers.

Passing the responsibility to the states is not an appropriate solution to the national problem of hunger.

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