
April 25, 2007

“Making America Stronger: U.S. Food Stamp Program” Video Script

-Fade up-

Senator Bob Dole:

If you ask the first five thousand recipients of the Food Stamp program how it originated and who, sort of, pushed it along, I don't think they would know. But that's not important, the important thing is that they benefit and they have a better quality of life.

-Dissolve-

Senator George McGovern:

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say, we revolutionized the Food Stamp Program for the better. We brought in millions of people who heretofore had never heard of the program or who couldn't afford to participate.

-Fade to Black -

VIDEO OPEN

-Music and Title Animation-

NARRATOR: THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM WAS ESTABLISHED AS A SAFETY NET AGAINST HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION FOR LOW-INCOME AMERICANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Diana Lee:

It saved me, you know. It kept me out of the hospital, the emergency room.

NARRATOR: DIANA'S FOOD STAMPS HELP WHERE HER DISABILITY INCOME ISN'T ENOUGH.

Without the food stamps, I'd have to spend cash on food, sometimes, that took away my medication money.

Aida Corredor:

I don't think that any mother wants to see their children suffering and starving, but I went through that.

NARRATOR: AIDA SUPPORTS HERSELF TODAY, BUT BACK IN THE 70s THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM GAVE HER SUPPORT TO RAISE HER SONS.

When I apply for the food stamp benefit it was a "blessing."

NARRATOR: TODAY, THE PROGRAM HELPS MILLIONS OF FAMILIES, SENIORS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AND LOW-WAGE WORKING AMERICANS AFFORD ACCESS TO ENOUGH FOOD.

(1930s Music at top)

NARRATOR: FOOD STAMPS WERE FIRST INTRODUCED TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AS A "PILOT PROGRAM" DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

MABEL MCFIGGIN OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK, WAS THE FIRST FOOD STAMP RECIPIENT. SHE PAID 4 DOLLARS AND GOT 6 DOLLARS WORTH OF STAMPS IN RETURN. AN ORANGE STAMP COULD BUY ANY FOOD, WHILE A BLUE STAMP WAS GOOD FOR ONLY WHAT THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE DEEMED TO BE "IN SURPLUS."

THAT PROGRAM LASTED THROUGH THE EARLY 40S. FOOD STAMPS WERE REVIVED IN THE 60S AS PART OF THE WAR ON POVERTY, BUT AMERICANS STILL HAD TO PAY FOR THEIR STAMP COUPONS AND FOR THE POOREST THAT WAS A HARDSHIP.

MANY OF US, TODAY, PROBABLY DON'T REMEMBER THE EXTREME POVERTY THAT EXISTED IN POCKETS OF OUR COUNTRY IN THE 1960s.

Dr. Aaron Shirley:

We saw so many who died as a secondary consequence to severe malnutrition.

NARRATOR: Dr. AARON SHIRLEY WAS PART OF A TEAM OF DOCTORS THAT INVESTIGATED.

You'd see skinny legs, skinny arms, shrunken facial features and a bloated belly. That's what really as a pediatrician got my attention.

NARRATOR: THE DOCTORS' WORK BECAME PART OF A CBS DOCUMENTARY, HOSTED BY CHARLES KURALT, CALLED "HUNGER IN AMERICA."

CBS Documentary Narrator:

This baby is dying of starvation. He was an American. Now he is dead.

NARRATOR: IT SHOCKED THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

Senator George McGovern:

I was watching a documentary on CBS. It was 1968 and I remember saying, “Why are they looking at hunger in the United States?” The incident that caught my attention was they picked up on a little boy alongside of the room leaning against the wall...

-Dissolves into actual scene from the documentary-

CBS Documentary Interviewer:

Well, when you get to school, what do you have to eat there?

Boy:

Nothing.

CBS Documentary Interviewer:

You don't have anything to eat when you're at school?

Boy:

Nothing.

Senator George McGovern:

The interviewer said to this boy, “What do you think when you stand here day after day, watching the other children eat and you can't join with them?” He said, “I'm ashamed.”

-Dissolves into actual scene from the documentary-

Boy:

I'm ashamed.

CBS Documentary Interviewer:

Are you ashamed?

Boy:

Yes.

CBS Documentary Interviewer:

Why are you ashamed?

Boy:

I don't have any money.

Senator George McGovern:

I said to my family that was watching the documentary with me, “You know, it's not that little boy who should be ashamed, it's George McGovern, a United States Senator, a member on the Committee on Agriculture.”

So I went to the Senate the very next day and introduced a resolution to create what was the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, and for the next 10 years that committee led the way in this country in making sure every member of Congress, every American knew about hunger in this country.

Bob Dole was the ranking Republican on the committee, I was the chairman, and we worked hand-in-glove. We didn't play any partisan politics with this issue.

Senator Bob Dole:

What really impressed me were the field hearings, and you saw it first-hand and you knew it wasn't something some network maybe dreamed up or whatever and found some isolated cases. I think we began to understand it was widespread and needed to be addressed.

NARRATOR: IN THE EARLY 70s, WHILE FOOD STAMPS WERE HELPING TO PROTECT MILLIONS FROM HUNGER, IT WAS CLEAR THAT CHANGES IN THE PROGRAM COULD IMPROVE ITS EFFICIENCY AND REACH.

SENATORS DOLE AND MCGOVERN TOOK THE LEAD. THEY TEAMED WITH CONGRESSMAN TOM FOLEY IN THE HOUSE AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION TO PASS THE FOOD STAMP REFORM ACT OF 1977.

THIS BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION REVOLUTIONIZED THE PROGRAM, AND MADE THE PROGRAM MORE EFFICIENT AND MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE POOR BY FINALLY ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT THAT AMERICANS PAY FOR A PORTION OF THEIR STAMPS.

Senator Bob Dole:

If you didn't have that money to put up then you weren't eligible for the program. It didn't make any sense to me.

NARRATOR: IT WAS AROUND THIS SAME TIME THAT DR. AARON SHIRLEY RETURNED TO THE PLACES OF SEVERE HUNGER HE HAD WITNESSED A DECADE EARLIER

Dr. Aaron Shirley:

It was after the food stamp program had been in existence, and it was just amazing and rewarding to see some of the same people that we had interviewed, how much better they were in terms of their nutrition status and their outlook on life.

NARRATOR: TODAY'S FOOD STAMP PROGRAM IS EVEN STRONGER, AS A RESULT OF KEY REFORMS PUT IN PLACE IN RECENT YEARS BY CONGRESS, STATES AND THE WHITE HOUSE.

TODAY'S PROGRAM BENEFITS 26 MILLION AMERICANS EVERY MONTH. MORE THAN HALF ARE CHILDREN.

Wendy Tabb:

It's more pain for you to have your children to be hungry than for you to be hungry.

NARRATOR: THE PROGRAM IS EXTREMELY EFFICIENT AND HAS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ACCURACY IN ITS HISTORY. 98 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE TODAY ARE INDEED ELIGIBLE. BENEFIT TRANSACTIONS ARE SIMPLER: PAPER COUPONS HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY DEBIT-LIKE E.B.T. CARDS.

THE PROGRAM IS A KEY SUPPORT FOR WORKING FAMILIES. IT SERVES NEARLY TWICE THE NUMBER OF LOW-WAGE WORKING AMERICANS THAN THOSE WHO RELY ON WELFARE.

Jane Schwartz, Director of North Carolina Food Stamp Program:

One of the myths in the food stamp program is that it serves only those who won't work or can't work for some reason, but the opposite is true. We have more and more working families, especially families with children.

NARRATOR: IMPROVING NUTRITION IS A TOP PRIORITY.

Kate Coler, USDA:

The food stamp program has a really aggressive nutrition education component to it, and we really do need to help people learn how to eat a nutritious diet to improve their health and overall well being.

NARRATOR: AND THE PROGRAM RAPIDLY RESPONDS IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC NEED. NEARLY 2 MILLION NEW "HOUSEHOLDS" WERE TEMPORARILY ENROLLED IN "DISASTER FOOD STAMPS" AFTER HURRICANES RITA, WILMA AND KATRINA.

Verna Walker:

After the storm, I lost everything and I was informed that we could apply for food stamps. I did not have any food, I did not have anything and so I applied for food stamps and I received food stamps for 2 months.

NARRATOR: FOOD STAMPS HAVE ALL BUT ELIMINATED THE SEVERE HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION THAT WE SAW IN THE 1960s. BUT YET, IN THE US TODAY, THE CENSUS BUREAU ESTIMATES THAT MORE THAN 1 IN 10 ADULTS AND 1 IN 6 CHILDREN DON'T HAVE REGULAR ACCESS TO ENOUGH FOOD.

Cheryl Burchett:

Your stomach is constantly growling. It starts to hurt, being in pain. (Tears up and starts crying.) It just, it just feels like a ball of knots.

NARRATOR: DR. DEBORAH FRANK FOUNDED THE "GROW CLINIC" IN BOSTON FOR MALNOURISHED CHILDREN.

Dr. Deborah Frank:

There's a substantial hunger problems, it's at least 1 out of 5 of the children under 3 coming through our emergency room here, and it is really frightening to me that food insecurity is so prevalent among these very young children in the critical period of brain growth.

NARRATOR: DR. FRANK SAYS THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM IS HAVING AN IMPACT.

I've seen when the family has gotten some food stamps and suddenly the child comes back in a month and you say, "Wow that's great weight gain, what happened?"

NARRATOR: 40 PERCENT OF THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS MISS OUT ON BENEFITS. MANY DON'T KNOW THEY ARE ELIGIBLE. OTHERS FIND THE PROCESS TOO DIFFICULT.

EVEN FOR THOSE ON FOOD STAMPS, BENEFITS CAN RUN OUT BEFORE THE END OF THE MONTH, CREATING TOUGH CHOICES ABOUT WHETHER TO BUY FOOD OR PAY OTHER BILLS.

Demetric Tyson:

I had to decide on what if I want to pay the light bill or what if I want to put some food in the house. It was a hard decision.

NARRATOR: CHARITIES AND CHURCHES PROVIDE SOME HELP BUT CAN'T FILL THE GROWING NEED.

Barb Packer:

We can't do it all, you know, we're stretched. Our congregation members are stretched.

NARRATOR: BARB PACKER IS HEAD OF LUTHERAN FOOD PANTRY SERVICES IN CENTRAL OHIO. THIS PANTRY ALONE SERVES SIX THOUSAND PEOPLE A MONTH ON AVERAGE, A 25% INCREASE OVER LAST YEAR, AND IT'S A STRUGGLE...

Barb Packer:

We're at the point where a lot of the small community churches, as good hearted as these people are, they can't continue to give at the rate that they're giving to take care of the problem.

NARRATOR 36: AT THIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF KIDS WHO COME TO SCHOOL HUNGRY.

Julie Winland, School Nurse, Columbus Public Schools:

Children come to school with stomach aches because they're hungry, children don't perform well in school because they're hungry. They want to come to school because they're hungry and they know they're going to get a meal.

NARRATOR: EVERY FRIDAY AT SCHOOLS IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, KIDS RECEIVE SPECIAL BACKPACKS FILLED WITH FOOD FROM THE LOCAL FOOD BANK SO THEY CAN EAT OVER THE WEEKEND.

Scott Young: Executive Director, Food Bank of Lincoln:

There is hunger that the backpack program exposes every week. We're currently distributing 510 backpacks every Friday afternoon. Food banks are a great support system for hungry people but bigger answers are needed to keep people from going hungry in our country.

NARRATOR: THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM IS AS ESSENTIAL TODAY AS IT WAS 30 YEARS AGO. AND IT CAN DO MORE: MILLIONS OF AMERICANS ARE STILL IN NEED.

Reverend Stephen Tucker:

You're going to have to come to where the people are, see the suffering, see the effects and how it has a rippling effect in our total society. I think the Food Stamp Program is a must.

Mary Wilson:

It's really a blessing, you know, for the government to provide this 'cause a lot of people couldn't make it if it wasn't for that, 'cause I've been there.

NARRATOR: THIS YEAR, THE HIGHLY RESPECTED *NATIONAL JOURNAL* CALLED THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM "ONE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S TOP SUCCESSES".

Former Rep. Charlie Stenholm (D-Texas):

I started out in congress not being a supporter of food stamps because I was one of those that believed that there was a lot of waste, fraud and abuse. I evolved into a supporter of the Food Stamp Program based on the facts.

Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Missouri):

It's our responsibility as good citizens and as a government to help give people the means by which they can help themselves, and I think food stamps are one of the tools that we can use.

Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana):

This is essential that there be at least that kind of safety net to provide food, not just for the elderly and the very young and the helpless, but ordinary citizens who are trying to get on their feet.

Senator Bob Dole:

We've always had people in need, and we've always tried to address those needs, but never in such a comprehensive way as the Food Stamp Reform Act of 1977.

Senator George McGovern:

I still would like to see the Food Stamp Program expanded, so that we don't have hard-working poor families running out of stamps before the end of the month.

NARRATOR: THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM HAS A RICH HISTORY IN HELPING THE NATION'S POOR, AND IT CONTINUES TO BE OUR NATION'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST HUNGER.

-Music-

-Fade to Black-