

GOVERNOR MARTIN O'MALLEY

Ending Childhood Hunger in America

June 3, 2009

Thank you all for everything you are doing and for coming out here tonight.

Secretary Vilsack, thank you for your leadership. It's such a refreshing thing to be able to call cabinet officials in your federal government, and to have them actually answer the phone (*Laughter*). It's a wonderful experience to be able to get things done and make government work under our new President.

To Billy Shore and to Debbie and to everyone with Share our Strength, thank you for everything you are doing for this most important cause of eradicating childhood hunger.

Introduction

In my time in public life, I have had the great honor to be able to serve the people of Baltimore and also the people of Maryland,... a state that's been called "America in Miniature."

For as long as I've had the privileged to serve, I've become convinced that for all our diversity (which is our greatest strength), there is a lot more that unites us than divides us. And that the big, important beliefs that bring us together are our belief in the dignity in every individual, our belief in our own responsibility to advance in common good, and our understanding that what we do in our lifetimes actually does matter,... that there's a unity to spirit and matter and that God wants every partial victory.

I think all of you understand that as well, and that's why you're here.

You understand that the pursuit of an end to childhood hunger in our country matters quite a bit.

If we believe that in the 21st century there's no such thing as a spare American,... if we believe in the importance of investing in our shared future,... then this is a very, very important cause. It's an important mission, it's an important "deliverable."

There are certain aspirations (I think anyway) which are universal to all people. Whether we're old, or young, or short, or tall, or Democrats, or Republicans, I think all of us agree that our children regardless of their parent's party affiliation deserve a healthy start, and they deserve a shot at becoming all that God would hope for them to be.

And I think all of us can agree that no child in America should have to endure the daily affliction of hunger.

We have seen the correlation in the City of Baltimore between the achievements of our children and what happens when we start offering school breakfast programs.

We have now a President in Barrack Obama who understands that as well. He's demonstrated such tremendous courage and vision by calling for an elimination of childhood hunger in America by 2015. And as has been our tradition for the last 200 years, Maryland would like to help our President lead the way! (*Applause*).

As Billy Shore said, in Maryland we declared this to be one of our goals: to become the first state in America to eliminate childhood hunger,... drawing upon our Revolutionary tradition.

I wanted to share with you some of the things that we're doing in Maryland, because one of the things I think that we confront in addition to childhood hunger, is "adult cynicism" about what we're capable of achieving as a people.

It's been a really brutal last eight years when it comes to running roughshod over the confidence that, as Americans, we're capable of accomplishing big things (a confidence that more often than not, we have enjoyed as a people).

Eliminating Childhood Hunger in Maryland

We recently announced 15 big goals in our State, and not surprisingly we ran into people saying "*well that can't be done, you can't reduce violent crime by 10% a year.*" Well actually we reduced homicides by 12% last year, and we're at 10% this year,... so in fact it can be done.

We ran into people saying "*You can't set the big goal of having the best public school system in the United States of America*"... well actually we did, and more importantly we made the choices and the investments to make it happen, and now we actually do.

We ran into people saying "*You can't make the Bay a better place and the rivers healthier every year*"... Well actually some *are* becoming healthier, and we can make the others healthier as well.

And the same is true with eliminating childhood hunger.

We know where the families are, we know by census maps where the targets are. It's not a million children, it's not two billion children. There are a finite number of kids we need to reach out to.

So this is how we plan to get there,...

First and foremost, by partnering with Share our Strength, this visionary, courageous organization. And Mr. Secretary we're creating the how-to manual for other states and that's roman numeral one, partner with Share our Strength. (*Laughter, Applause*)

Together we're bringing together stakeholders from across our State and federal government.

We determined that there are enough federal dollars available to Maryland to feed the approximately 184,000 children in our state who did not have ready or reliable access to food. The problem was that the federal programs already in place were being underutilized.

So we identified four federal programs where we felt we could make immediate progress by increasing enrollment within this fiscal year. And what are they? The *School Food Nutrition Program*, the *Summer Food Service Program*, the *Child and Adult Food Program*, and the *Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program*.

We created action plans to increase enrollment. We stepped up our outreach, we stepped up our marketing (something that governments never, ever do). And most importantly we committed to measuring our progress and holding our efforts accountable, so that we can identify the challenges and the opportunities, and yes also the gaps, to determine where we wanted to go, and whether or not we were getting there.

I wanted to give you just a couple of examples,...

We are now giving schools the opportunity to experiment with new school breakfast models, such as serving breakfast in the classroom, ... what a novel, innovative, and revolutionary idea -- some of this stuff can actually be simple, can't it Billy? "*Poverty is complicated, feeding a child is simple,*" to quote Billy Shore.

We're also making "Grab-and-Go meals" available and through the Child and Adult Care food program, we are going to make our State one of only ten in the nation to provide an after school supper program, which, thank you Secretary Vilsack, is being reimbursed by the USDA (*Applause*). And very importantly, meals will be served not only on school days but also on weekends, holidays, and during school breaks.

What's more, we're now allowing food stamp applications to be filled out online.

So how are we progressing towards these goals? At present, we've added more than 24,000 children to our school breakfast programs for an increase of nearly 20% (*Applause*).

We've added nearly 17,700 families to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

And we've increased the number of licensed child care facilities participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, with an additional 25 facilities enrolled during this program year.

And we hope to do more, every week, every month, every day.

Conclusion

Let me leave you with a thought from former President Kennedy, who said that "*the war against hunger is truly mankind's war of liberation.*" Mankind's war of liberation.

In our own here and now, our own war on childhood hunger, is a battle to liberate our country from broken dreams and from unmet potential. From the tragedy of lost opportunity and the affliction of diminished hopes.

It's within our capacity as a people to eliminate childhood hunger, if we choose. If we choose to answer our collective conscience. If we choose to embrace our shared compassion. If we choose to accept our shared responsibility to advance the common good. If we embrace those values, those beliefs that unite us.

And we're so very, very fortunate, especially in this point in time, to have a leader in President Barack Obama who's committed to leading us forward. Who, when faced by those who say "*we can't do that*" says instead "*Yes we can.*"

We can and we must. And we will with your help.

Thanks very, very much.