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Senate Ag Committee considers \$10 billion more for child nutrition

By Stewart Doan

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Senate Ag Committee Chairman Blanche Lincoln gavelled to order her first committee hearing on reauthorization of federal child nutrition programs on Tuesday. Noting the release of USDA's annual report on hunger and food insecurity, Lincoln said the report talks about "families that are either hungry or a meal or two away from being hungry" and highlights the **"seriousness of the child nutrition bill that lies before us."**

The Arkansas Democrat outlined her priorities for the legislation: (1) ensuring that all children eligible for federal child nutrition programs are actually receiving them; (2) improving the nutritional quality of meals provided through child nutrition programs; and (3) modernizing and improving the integrity of child nutrition programs.

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) suggested the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization was a necessary prerequisite to reforming the nation's health care system. "The essential, underlying feature of having a healthy country is having healthy kids," Harkin asserted, adding, "If we're going to change all this system of how we're paying the bills and yet we've got kids coming along that are overweight and obese and have diabetes and have high blood pressure, we're going to go broke."

Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) said he had no doubt Congress would go along with the Obama administration's request for \$10 billion in additional funding for child nutrition programs over the next decade, but wondered where the money would come from.

Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack urged the committee to focus on the cost of inaction. **"If we fail to address this issue aggressively now, we will clearly, clearly pay for it in significant increases in health care expenditures in the future."** For more on USDA's report on food security, go to: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091116USDA.pdf> or listen to our Tuesday and Wednesday audio updates at www.Agri-Pulse.com