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MARCH 23, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I am presenting today to the Congress the Child Nutrition Reform Act of 1976. This proposal is designed to facilitate the States' efforts to feed needy children by consolidating 15 food programs -- including forty different meal subsidies -- into a single block grant.

Good nutrition is a key factor in the physical, mental and social development of the Nation's children. It is essential that children not be denied a healthful diet because of limited family resources. For this reason the Federal government has developed subsidy programs to provide lunches for needy children.

Children from all families, regardless of income, may receive Federal subsidies for meals served by eligible institutions. The Federal government now provides approximately 20% of the total cost of school lunches served to all children, regardless of their nutritional need or income.

However, due to program changes enacted by the Congress, the Federal government will be required to spend even more money on non-needy children. At the same time, there are at least 700,000 children from poor families receiving no benefits whatsoever.

I believe that the Federal government has a responsibility to provide nutrition assistance to those most in need. At the same time, I believe that the existing Federal taxpayer subsidies for the meals of children from families able to feed themselves extends that Federal responsibility beyond the appropriate point.

In addition, under existing law, the 15 programs enacted into detailed legislation with the same objective -- feeding needy and non-needy children -- have resulted in a patchwork of complicated Federal controls and regulations.

Therefore, today I request that the Congress enact the "Child Nutrition Reform Act of 1976."

This legislation would:

- Provide financial assistance to States based on the cost of feeding all needy children.

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- Consolidate 15 complex categorical and overlapping programs into a single block grant to States, increasing their flexibility in administering these programs, and at the same time save the taxpayers nearly \$900 million in FY 1977 by reducing assistance to non-needy children.
- Remove unnecessary restrictions and red tape governing the way meals are provided to needy children.
- Give concerned organizations and individuals in each State an opportunity to be involved in the planning of child feeding programs.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,  
MARCH 23, 1976

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