

School Lunch Program and more than 11 million participating in the National School Breakfast Program, I believe that good nutrition within our Nation's schools is more important than ever. And that is all the more pressing, given that many children consume at least half of their daily calories at school, and for many students participating in these programs, the food served at school may be the only food they regularly eat.

For that, and many other reasons, I stand here today in support of Senate amendment No. 757. Specifically, the amendment would ensure that Federal school meal programs will be permitted to provide fruits and vegetables consistent with the most recent dietary guidelines.

Specifically, the recently proposed rule to improve nutrition requirements for the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program would limit the total servings of starchy vegetables, including the white potato, to one cup per week and completely eliminate those vegetables from school breakfasts. I am particularly disturbed by this recommendation because they actually contradict the recently published 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, as well as the 2005 Dietary Guidelines they are supposed to reflect.

Our most recent national Dietary Guidelines—those released this past January—simply state that “intake by Americans of some nutrients is low enough to be of public health concern. They are potassium, dietary fiber, calcium, and vitamin D.” As you may know, there are few fruits or vegetables that contain the levels of potassium in potatoes. In fact, a medium potato—5.3 oz with the skin—is not only a good source of potassium, but also contains significantly more potassium—200 mg more—than its nearest rival, the banana.

Additionally, one serving of potato has as much fiber as broccoli and provides 13 percent of the daily recommended value. In an attempt to combat these deficiencies the 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend that all Americans, including school age children, consume 5 cups of starchy vegetables a week. This is an increase in recommended consumption from the recommendations of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for 3 cups of starchy vegetables per week. And yet the proposed rule would limit the total number of servings of starchy vegetables to one cup per week in our school lunch program, which is entirely inconsistent with the 2005 and 2010 Dietary Guideline recommendations.

I believe that it is clear that potatoes are a nutrient powerhouse, and the fact that the white potato offers 13 percent of a child's daily potassium requirements for less than 5 cents per serving provides further support for keeping potatoes in school meals, especially during challenging budgetary times.

The Federal Government should allow our struggling schools to make fiscally responsible choices that offer the most nutritional return on investment. In fact, USDA has estimated that the proposed meal plan will increase school lunch costs by \$6.8 billion over 5 years, and it cannot be denied that a significant part of this increase is due to the limit on potatoes. Limiting starchy vegetables to 1 cup per week will increase costs by approximately 5.6 percent with possible adverse affects on nutritional quality.

It has been well documented that, currently, nine out of ten Americans are not achieving vegetable and fruit consumption recommendations. I am disappointed that during such a time, that the USDA would propose rules denying our nation's youth access to nutrient-rich foods as part of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.

And let me just say before the issue is raised that no one is arguing in favor of a diet based on french fries. The truth is—to combat the wave of obesity and promote more healthy food choices we must promote food items that present a diverse set of vitamins and minerals. No matter how they are prepared, potatoes are currently included in healthy school meal plans to meet national dietary guidelines. Yet many Americans seem to believe all potatoes served in schools are in the form of deep fried french fries.

This may have been the case at one time, but today, according to our own school food service administrators, most potatoes served in schools are baked, not fried. Like 80 percent of schools nationwide, the deep fryers in York and Kittery, ME schools, for example, were removed years ago. As the school nutrition director of those schools, Ms. Doris Demers informed me recently that, in her 18 years working in school nutrition, she has never seen fryers in a Maine school nutrition program. When prepared properly, the potato is packed with nutrition and is a cost-effective option for the school lunch and breakfast programs.

While I will continue to endeavor with my colleagues to support improved nutritional standards for all Americans, I am concerned that many throughout our nation cannot help but get confused about which guideline they should try to follow. For these reasons, I respectfully request that my colleagues join me in encouraging USDA to be consistent on their nutritional advice to the American public—of all ages.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

AMENDMENT NO. 772 TO AMENDMENT NO. 738

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator MURRAY, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up amendment No. 772.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Illinois [Mr. DURBIN], for Mrs. MURRAY, proposes an amendment numbered 772 to amendment No. 738.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To strike a section providing for certain exemptions from environmental requirements for the reconstruction of highway facilities damaged by natural disasters or emergencies)

Strike section 128 of division C.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Illinois for letting me take care of this matter, which I hope will be disposed of quickly.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SSI EXTENSION FOR ELDERLY AND DISABLED REFUGEES ACT OF 2011

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1721, introduced earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1721) to amend section 402 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to extend the eligibility period for supplemental security income benefits for refugees, asylees, and certain other humanitarian immigrants, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time, that a budgetary pay-go statement be printed, and that the Senate proceed to a vote on passage of the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this is the Statement of Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation for S. 1721.

Total Budgetary Effects of S. 1721 for the 5-year Statutory PAYGO Scorecard: net decrease in the deficit of \$24 million.

Total Budgetary Effects of S. 1721 for the 10-year Statutory PAYGO Scorecard: net decrease in the deficit of \$24 million.

Also submitted for the RECORD as part of this statement is a table prepared by the Congressional Budget Office, which provides additional information on the budgetary effects of this act.

The information follows.