

THOMAS YELLOW HAIR: This afternoon you made comments that you had, that the nutrition program had increased almost every year.

MR. BOST: No, not almost. For sure. Go back and look at the budget documents and you will see that there has been an increase in my budget every year that I've been Under Secretary.

THOMAS YELLOW HAIR: Okay. With that being said, what I'd like to see is, I'd like to see some of those increases get down to the grassroots level for 2006. You indicated that the increase is what's going to go to offset personnel related costs. A lot of times I think some of these increases end up in administrative costs instead of getting down to the grassroots people. I'd like to see more of those increases going, helping the grassroots people.

MR. BOST: Interestingly enough, all overall administrative costs have decreased every year that I have been Under Secretary. My father has a saying that's real important. My father says that, "We see the world from where we stand". And you want specific increases for your program. The WIC people want specific increases for their program. The Food Stamp people want specific increases for their program. And the commodity people say theirs is the most important, and the Summer Food Program -- there are 15 nutrition programs.

Part of my job, along with the administration and Congress is to make a determination, as best as I can, on what we can do, what's going to be equitable and fair, and meet the needs across the whole spectrum of the nutrition programs that I'm responsible for.

The president submits the budget. I take that budget and I in turn submit it to Congress. Congress in turn, they question me; they spank me; they beat me up; they make a determination of what they want, and they say, here's the budget, MR. Bost. You manage it.

Now, I may go, and I have gone on several instances to say, you need to support the President's budget for FDPIR. I make the case, and Congress says, no, we don't want to do that, we want to appropriate more money for this program. You call me and say, "MR. Bost, why didn't you give me more money for this program?" That's the way it works. We see the world from where we stand. The issue is, that overall, when you look at those 15 nutrition programs that I manage, there has been an increase every year. That's better than there being a decrease every year. Because if there was a decrease, all 15 nutrition programs, at some level, would suffer. You may not get what you think you want or deserve, but the fact remains that there has not been a decrease.

Now, the people in the Department of Housing, the people over in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Interior, they cannot say that. They cannot say that they have seen an increase in their budget every year. Only we can say that. It may not give you what you want, but at least we can say that it has not been a significant decrease.

Part of our job, and the reason that I'm here, is to say to all of you, one, this is a program that's very important to us. And it's a program that is very important to me, personally; and it's a program

that's very important to the Secretary. And I will tell you that it is a program that is very important to the president. That's why I'm here. And that's why I've taken time to listen to you.

As we move forward toward developing some recommendations for this program, and the Food Stamp Program, and the Commodity Program that is up for reauthorization, come 2007, this is something that I don't have to do. I can sit in my office in Washington, and I can make recommendations without ever coming out to see you; talk to you; listen to you, or see any of your programs. But that's not my approach. My approach is, that this is a program that is important to me. And I know that it's important to you. I think it is critical that we have the opportunity to listen to what you have to say, because you are the closest to the operation of this program, and hopefully you have an insight that other people would not have. And that's why I'm here, for you to have the opportunity to share with me, what you believe are important aspects of this program, that we need to consider as we look at putting those recommendations together that I will present to Congress.

You have two responsibilities that I see. One, of course, is to share those recommendations with me. And the other responsibility that I believe that you have is also to share the things you have shared with me to members of Congress that represent you. Because they'll make those decisions. I am going to make recommendations, and we will make them very strong, and we are going to make them based on what we think is in the best interest of meeting the needs of every person in this country that is eligible to participate in this program. But we do not have the final authority in terms of making some of those decisions. That lies with Congress. That's why the programs are reauthorized.

But I'm here because it's important to me. You are important to me. I have nutrition programs, and I love them all, but there are some that are special. Just like you have children. You love them all, but there are some that are more special than others. Don't you? Don't you? One more time. Don't you? Exactly. It's no different. That's why I'm here, because this is a program that I care a great deal about, and you have some very unique challenges that other recipients don't have. You have high rates of diabetes; higher rates of obesity; cultural differences that are very unique to you, that other people don't have. The people in Mississippi would say they have very specific cultural differences too, but you have some that are different, and that's why I'm here.

This is the beginning of that process. This is a long process and we want to get an early start so we can start to have the opportunity to think about these things that we would recommend, that we would possibly change, that we could give some consideration to in terms of making this program better and more efficient and more effective in meeting your needs. That's why we are here. Hopefully that has gone a long way towards addressing some of the questions you have.

I want to thank you all for coming, and I want to thank all of you for participating. Some of you, I will try as best as I can over the course of the next several months to -

DARLENE BARNES: There is one between now and October 15th.