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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

#### Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

#### Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

### Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending

### Hearing on "Duplication, Overlap and Inefficiencies in Federal Welfare Programs"

June 1, 2011

Thank you Mr. Chairman. In February, the Government Accountability Office issued a 339-page report on potential duplication in federal programs. It described areas of overlap in several major programs, including defense, agriculture, energy, and homeland security.

The Majority decided to focus today's hearing on a tiny subset of these programs that help some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society: those in need of food, housing, transportation, and job training services.

The Majority is targeting these same programs for severe cuts in their 2012 budget proposals. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that two thirds of the Republican budget's programmatic spending cuts are to programs that serve people of limited means. That's \$2.9 trillion of a total of \$4.3 trillion in cuts.

The fact that low-income assistance is being targeted in this way is especially troubling given the Republican ultimatum last year to force the extension of all of President Bush's tax cuts for the nation's wealthiest individuals. It is even more troubling in light of their recent efforts to protect lucrative tax breaks for oil companies making record profits.

Americans across the country are struggling to overcome the impact of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. According to an October 2010 report issued by the Congressional Research Service, 3.7 million more people fell below the poverty line in 2009 compared to 2008. These 3.7 million people were pushed into poverty by a recession they did not create. In 2009, a total of 43.6 million people had incomes below the poverty line—more than at any time since we began tracking this measure in 1959.

The increase in poverty in America has been accompanied by increased hunger. In fact, in its report in February, the GAO found that in 2008, nearly 17 million households experienced food insecurity, meaning they had limited access to food during some part of the year. In my hometown of Baltimore, 13.5 percent of families with children fall into this category.

These are horrible statistics. But they are the benchmarks against which we measure our success as a society. I believe with all of my heart that our nation is better than this. We can do better, and we must.

Of course, we must strive to eliminate unnecessary duplication and streamline the delivery of benefits. But Mr. Chairman, I hope that the Republican idea of duplicative food assistance programs is NOT breakfast, lunch AND dinner. We must be clear about our priorities: ensuring that every hungry child is adequately fed, that every sick person has access to medical care, and that every family has a safe place to live.

These efforts not only help our fellow Americans get back on their feet, but they ensure that our next generation is ready to compete and succeed. The future of our country is in their hands.

Mr. Chairman, protecting the poor should not be a partisan issue. In his most recent State of the Union address, President Obama called for an end to unnecessary duplication in government programs. He also established an initiative called “Government Reform for Competitiveness and Innovation,” and he included several program cuts in his budget to help eliminate waste.

I applaud the President’s leadership, and I strongly support steps to help streamline government and make it work effectively and efficiently for the American people. I hope we can work together to improve—rather than eliminate—services to those struggling to meet the most basic needs of life.

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