

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 10, 2022

The Honorable Susan Rice
Director
Domestic Policy Council
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Ambassador Rice,

The 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health (WHC) was a seminal event that influenced the federal nutrition agenda for the next several decades. Bringing together stakeholders from the policy arena, academia, and civil society, the WHC produced nearly 1,800 recommendations and the years following saw the nationwide expansion of the National School Lunch Program and the creation of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among other policies.¹

On May 4, 2022, the Biden White House announced their own Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health (Conference), to be held in September 2022. This announcement touted the Conference as an opportunity to “accelerate progress and drive significant change to end hunger, improve nutrition and physical activity, reduce diet-related disease, and close the disparities around them.”² While each of these goals is laudable—and could potentially bring about the change envisioned in 1969 and executed thereafter—the subsequent process to bring this Conference to fruition is garnering more questions than answers, leading many stakeholders across multiple industries, consumer groups, and government agencies wondering if substantive plans exist or if this is simply a political storytelling stunt.

As the former Chair of the Subcommittee on Nutrition and current Republican Leader of the House Committee on Agriculture—not to mention a former recipient of nutrition aid—I am a strong advocate for serving Americans in need with innovation and flexibility, enhancing nutrition education, and promoting healthier eating and outcomes. Each of these priorities dovetail with the five pillars of the Conference: improve food access and affordability; integrate nutrition and health; empower all consumers to make and have access to health choices; support physical activity for all; and enhance nutrition and food security research.

At this juncture, however, the minimal outreach, organization, and programming of the Conference do not appear inclusive of all stakeholders. The Administration seems to be hand-selecting participants to drive a specific narrative and outcome related to the creation of a national strategy. I remain concerned this Conference will simply perpetuate a culture of government dependence through an expansion of feeding programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and solely focus on the priorities of advocates whose organizations are reliant on hungry people and the federal government to remain solvent.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7279882/#bib1>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/04/white-house-announces-conference-on-hunger-nutrition-and-health-in-september/>

I request you respond in writing to the following questions:

1. Why is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the lead entity when many of our nation's feeding programs span from the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)? Please share the deliberative process related to this decision, including any engagement the White House had with Members of Congress that resulted in the specificity found in the explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022.
2. What is the role of the USDA in Conference planning and execution? Is there coordination between the USDA and HHS? Please describe.
3. On July 19, 2022, Deputy Director Carmel Martin briefed Members of the House Committee on Agriculture. Members of her team at the Domestic Policy Council and the Executive Office of the President mentioned a 20-agency work group. Please name each of the agencies and what their mandates are as related to the Conference. Please also provide the staff responsible, and the contingency plan should they depart.
4. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services accepted feedback through July 15 via email and electronic portal, and since then, White House staff has alluded to ongoing submissions. To date, how many submissions have been received? What about those without Internet access—were submissions other than electronic solicited? If so, how many? If not, why? Who is responsible for reviewing submissions? Is there any vetting of the suggestions, stories, experiences, etc. conducted? How will these be used in the development of the alleged national strategy? Will the public have an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed strategy?
5. What is the relationship between the *Informing the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health Task Force* and the Domestic Policy Council as it relates to the planning and execution of the Conference? Please provide the dates and a summary of discussions related to any meetings held between the White House and this Task Force.
6. Please provide a list of all stakeholder organizations each facet of the White House has engaged with related to the Conference since its announcement on May 4.

I share an interest in improving the health and well-being of all Americans and look forward to your response no later than August 31, 2022. In the meantime, please contact Jennifer Tiller, Deputy Staff Director, House Committee on Agriculture Minority (jennifer.tiller@mail.house.gov) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Republican Leader
House Committee on Agriculture