

Article of the Week (AoW) Directions

1. Mark up your confusion – either highlighting or underlining
2. Mark up the text. Annotate the article with comments, questions, inferences, etc. You can use a variety of sentences, phrases, or symbols to show your thinking.
3. Write a developed paragraph response to one of the prompts below.

She's hoping for summer lunch money

Source: Rob Hotakainen/McClatchy Washington Bureau/May 30, 2014

WASHINGTON — Charity Edwards is unemployed and separated from her husband, raising four kids on a monthly income of \$1,100.

She gets another \$419 a month in food stamps to help feed her two girls, ages 6 and 11, and her two boys, ages 15 and 17.

“There’s not money left to buy clothes,” said Edwards, 38, of Everett, Washington.

Under a bill introduced Wednesday by Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, Edwards would get \$600 — \$150 per child — to buy food when schools are not in session each summer.

Murray jumped into the latest food fray on Capitol Hill, where members of Congress are bickering over school lunch rules, including how much to spend on poor children and what foods would most benefit them.

She said her plan would cost \$42 billion over 10 years, helping 30 million kids, including 475,000 in Washington state and nearly 62,000 in Pierce County alone, beginning in 2016.

Eligible families — those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches during the school year — would get the money for summer food in electronic benefit transfer cards. (Benton County, Wash., has 17,617 eligible children, Thurston has 15,155, Franklin has 13,478 and Whatcom has 10,612, according to Murray’s office.)

“When school lets out for the summer, many of those same kids lose access to regular meals and go without the nutrition that they need,” Murray said in an interview. “I believe that kids shouldn’t have to spend the summer months wondering when they’re going to get the next meal.”

As part of her work, Murray is promoting smaller details, too: She wants poor children to be able to eat more white potatoes, a big crop in her state.

Murray, along with Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state and 18 other senators, wrote a letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture asking to include white potatoes on the list of approved foods used in the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. Many Republicans in the House of Representatives back the idea, too. Critics, however, say kids already eat enough starchy vegetables and that they should eat other, healthier vegetables.

The issues will come to a head in coming weeks as Congress finalizes new spending plans for the Agriculture Department, which oversees school lunches and the WIC program.

But finding consensus will be difficult.

In the House, many Republicans worry that the school lunch program already is too costly.

And they fear it will get even more expensive with new federal guidelines backed by first lady Michelle Obama. They would require schools to offer more fruits and vegetables, whole-wheat products and low-sodium foods. The guidelines have been phased in over the past two years, with more changes due this year.

Critics say it's a mistake to force schools to offer food that many students refuse to eat, resulting in more food in the garbage and fewer students eating the meals.

"Less kids are buying school lunches and that undermines the intention to increase healthy eating in schools," said Republican Rep. Robert Aderholt of Alabama, the chairman of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. After hosting a school meal forum in his home state last month, Aderholt said it was time "to hit the pause button" on new guidelines.

On Tuesday, his panel approved a bill that would let districts get waivers to opt out of the healthier school lunch guidelines if they're struggling financially to meet them. On the same day, the Agriculture Department announced that it would give "new flexibility" to schools by allowing them to serve traditional pasta instead of whole-grain for another two years.

The issue has provided plenty of fodder for the GOP in recent months.

In December, Republican Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia ignited a firestorm when he suggested the possibility of requiring schoolchildren to sweep the floors before getting free lunches.

In March, Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the GOP vice-presidential nominee in 2012, gave a speech in which he said the federal government was providing "a full stomach and an empty soul" to children who were getting free lunches.

Murray, a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the head of the Senate Budget Committee, said she was ready for the financial arguments but that she was banking on support for her hunger bill from Democrats and Republicans alike.

"Nutrition is important," she said. "We know the success of these programs today. And we know that we have an obligation to address poverty and hunger for our children."

Murray said her plan, called The Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2014, wouldn't increase the federal budget deficit, despite its hefty price tag.

She's proposing to offset the spending by changing a law that allows U.S. companies to finance expanded operations overseas with debt and then immediately deduct the interest before they report any taxable income. Murray wants to temporarily defer the deductions.

"That's a fair trade," Murray said. "It says that companies in our country that are taking advantage of tax loopholes that send jobs overseas ought to be investing in our young kids."

According to Murray, only 14 percent of the children in the United States who receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year take advantage of a federal summer school food program. The program funds nonprofit groups that serve lunches in congregate settings.

In Washington state, only 9.8 percent of eligible students go to the congregate settings, Murray said. The state ranks 38th in participation.

Edwards said her family used the summer lunch programs as much as possible but that mealtimes didn't always match up with schedules.

Edwards said her \$1,100 monthly income came from a combination of child support and government aid. With a subsidized housing voucher, she pays only \$33 a month for her four-bedroom rental house, but she said household expenses were always rising.

"My water bill is \$80 a month, my gas bill is \$200 a month, my electricity bill is \$45 a month," said Edwards, adding that she's "in the middle of a really bad divorce" after being a stay-at-home mom since 2006.

She fretted over the rising cost of meat after paying more than \$20 for ground beef and bacon at the grocery store last week. She said her food stamps didn't cover the cost of meals but that she grew 100 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables last summer, including tomatoes, sweet peas and blueberries.

Now Edwards is waiting on Congress for help, hoping members will back Murray's idea, adding that \$150 per child would go a long way.

"It doesn't sound like a lot, but if you're creative, like we try to be, you can stretch it as far as you can," Edwards said.

Respond to one of the following prompts. Use the back of this paper.

1. Should Congress pass the bill to provide federal aid to families in need to provide food for children in the summer? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with the changes in school lunch programs to provide healthier and more nutritious options? Why or why not?
3. Choose a word, paragraph, or passage from the article and respond to it.