

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 18, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader, United States Senate
United States Capitol, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, United States Senate
United States Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

During this critical time of record high gas and food costs, we are writing to request emergency funding for local aging programs that provide home-delivered meals and a range of critical supportive services to seniors in the next supplemental appropriations bill or economic stimulus package.

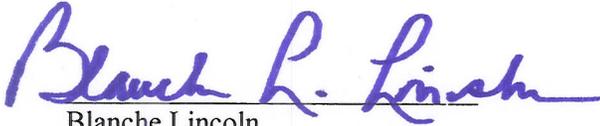
In April of this year, we sent a similar letter to the Appropriations Committee, signed by 38 Senators, asking for an overall increase of at least nine percent in appropriations (at least an additional \$184 million) for all Older Americans Act (OAA) programs in the fiscal year (FY) 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. A copy of this letter is attached. At that time, we knew that our aging network was suffering from a lack of funding to adequately meet the needs of our seniors. However, since that time, food and gas prices have made this funding gap even more severe and are threatening the well-being of our older Americans. Recently, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) and the Meals On Wheels Association of America (MOWAA) conducted surveys of their members to determine the impact of increased food and gas prices. The n4a findings are alarming and show that more than half of the Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs, which provide the critical nutrition, transportation, home-based care and other services to seniors in their homes, said that they had already cut back on programs because of gas costs. They also found that without additional funding, over 90 percent said they expected to make cuts in the 2009 fiscal year.

Because home-delivered meal programs are so dependent on volunteers, they also have been hit by a severe lack of a ready workforce as rapidly rising gas prices make it difficult for volunteers to continue to serve. In fact, in late May, when gas prices were lower than they are today, MOWAA found that more than 58 percent of their member meal programs had lost volunteers due to the gas crisis. As a result, local senior nutrition programs have had to make radical changes in operations, such as reducing the number of meals served (22 percent) or the number of times per week they are delivered (30 percent), eliminating delivery routes (49 percent), changing the type of meal served (38 percent), or reducing the number of clients the program could accept (36 percent). This is a truly a crisis for the vulnerable elderly who have no other access to nutritious meals.

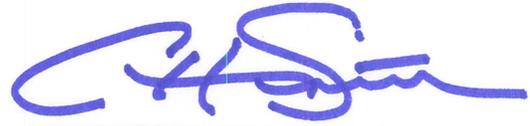
There now are more than 37 million Americans over the age of 65, nearly one in ten of whom live below the poverty line, and this demographic is growing at a faster rate than any other population group. We cannot wait until tomorrow – this is a crisis that must be addressed immediately. If we fail to act, cost-effective programs that keep older adults out of more expensive institutional care will not be able to sustain their current levels of service. Such shortsightedness only costs consumers and the government more in the end.

While we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we hope you will make every effort to provide this emergency funding for Older Americans Act programs in the next supplemental bill or economic stimulus package to forestall further cutbacks during the rest of this year.

Sincerely,



Blanche Lincoln
United States Senate



Gordon H. Smith
United States Senate

Enclosures (3)

Cc:

The Honorable Robert Byrd, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman
Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Ted Kennedy, Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Mike Enzi, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health Education, Labor
and Pensions

The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies