



## U.S. must invest in ending hunger

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It's "hard to imagine a higher budget priority than ensuring that all families have enough to eat," said [Joel Berg](#), the executive director of the New York Coalition Against Hunger, an umbrella group for the city's food pantries and soup kitchens.

It would be difficult to argue with Berg, author of the newly released book "All You can Eat: How Hungry is [America](#)?" After all, this is a prosperous and generous country where it is unacceptable to have people going hungry.

Or is it?

Berg calls his book "a wakeup call to the American people," and reminds readers that more than 36 million Americans - 12 million of them children - could not afford enough food in 2007, according to the [Agriculture Department](#).

In the eight years of the Bush administration, poverty and hunger in the nation have grown at an alarming pace, he writes.

In [New York City](#), the situation is no different.

The Human Resources Administration reports that nearly half of all the publicly funded feeding agencies in the city saw demand for their services rise 9% since 2007. They served 158,000 more meals to the needy in March and April of 2008 than they did during the same period the previous year.

Similar increases were reported in the rest of the state.

Yet, Berg argues, it should be relatively simple to put an end to hunger in America.

"As far as domestic issues go, hunger is a no-brainer," he writes. "Every human being needs to eat. And everyone is against hunger in America. Actually, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in America who says they are *for* hunger."

If there is such a consensus, why is hunger still growing?

Berg's answer is brief and to the point: "One word: *politics*."

Here in [New York](#), for example, [Gov. Paterson](#) made the political decision to have schoolchildren, working families, local property tax payers, students at [SUNY](#) and [CUNY](#), the elderly and people with disabilities absorb the brunt of \$2 billion in state budget cuts - while sparing the richest New Yorkers.

Berg, though, is hopeful that the [Obama](#) administration will realize the urgency of taking effective measures against hunger.

Obama, Berg pointed out, will be the first president in U.S. history to have grown up in a family that received food stamps.

"I think that he understands that this is a problem that cannot wait," Berg said. "He already set a goal of ending child hunger in the U.S. by 2015."

It won't be easy with the country in recession and involved in two wars. But Berg says that ending hunger is a long-term investment.

In his book, Berg offers the new President a common sense and affordable blueprint to achieve his goal.

For the cost of what the federal government spends each year to subsidize farmers, or shells out for three months of the [Iraq](#) war budget or 6% of [President George W. Bush's](#) tax cuts, hunger could be totally eradicated, Berg says.

"We almost eliminated hunger in the 1970s," Berg says. "But we have gone back"

One of the reasons, Berg says, is the mind-set that although government has to take care of every other problem in the country, when it comes to the hunger crisis, it is up to private charities to solve the problem.

"But when a bridge falls, we don't organize a charity bake sale," Berg says. "The government must take care of the hunger problem; private charities cannot do it."

"I urge everyone to write to their congresspeople and ask them to do their part."

[aruiz@nydailynews.com](mailto:aruiz@nydailynews.com).