

THE HUNGER LUNCHEON - KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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Ambassador Tony P. Hall – President, Alliance to End Hunger

Well, thank you, Ambassador, and Governor Ray and the co-laureates, Jo Luck and my friend, David Beckmann, and all you hunger advocates, wonderful people that care very much about an issue that is very dear to my heart and dear to your heart. And what an honor it is to be speaking to you today.

I've had an interesting career. I served a number of years in the state legislature in Ohio, and I served 24 years in the U.S. Congress, and then I was a U.S. ambassador to the World Food Program, FAO in Rome. And you would think that as a United States congressman and then as an ambassador, that it would be hard to be humble. But the fact is, when you're a U.S. ambassador or especially a U.S. congressman, you get humbled every day.

And I'll never forget my first election for Congress, and it was a very tight race, and it was a good candidate. In those days we debated the issues. It didn't get personal. We had something like 26 debates, and it was really a well... It was a classic campaign, if I can say so myself. But anyway, it looked like I was going to win, and in the last two weeks I had my campaign staff together, and there was about 20 of us.

And one of my friends came running in and said, "Tony, *Time Magazine* is on the phone. They want to speak to you." And, you know, in those days I was not elected to Congress, and if a reporter from a national magazine knew your name, that was really unusual because nobody really of national prominence really knew your name, especially if you weren't elected to Congress. And so I'm thinking — Wow. *Time Magazine* — this is really big time. And I said, "Well, get the name. I'll call them back in ten minutes."

And I'm thinking — you know, this is my chance to really make a splash in the United States. And, you know, *Time Magazine*, they're really going to be looking for something really important. And so I said to my friends and my supporters, "I want to say three things — what do you think?" And they said, "You know, that sounds pretty good." And I said, "Well, let's get that person from *Time Magazine* back on the phone, and I'm thinking — I am really ready to speak to America.

Okay. This is what that person from *Time Magazine* said: "Hi, Tony. This is Kathy from *Time Magazine*. Would you be renewing your subscription to *Time*?" You get humbled every day.

When President Bush appointed me ambassador, he said to me two things. He says, "I want you to feed the world, and I want you to bring hope to the hungry." And I looked at him and it got real quiet. I said, "Is that all?"

As the director of the Alliance to End Hunger, I lead a coalition of more than 80 corporations, nonprofits, universities, faith-based organizations, and we're dedicated to building the political will and the public will to end hunger.

And we do this by we broker partnerships between Alliance members, like some of the ones you've heard about this morning, between Elanco Animal Health and Heifer International, and we elevate hunger on the national agenda by studying how voters think about hunger, and we share it with politicians and the media. And I believe most importantly we cultivate and we build champions for hungry people among our elected

officials.

What's the problem? Well, I think you know the problems as well as I do. You've heard about them and will continue to hear more about them this week. More than two billion people in the world today make less than two dollars a day, and one billion people make a dollar a day, and 25,000 people will die before the day is up — and they'll die of hunger, and they'll die of hunger-related diseases.

Forty-nine million people in America are living at risk of hunger today in our own country. How can that be? Hunger, both domestically and abroad is fundamentally a condition of public and political will. It's not a question of know-how of — we don't know what to do. We know what to do, and we know what it'll cost. Hunger persists because, I think, we lack the leadership and the collective will to end it.

Everybody's got a role to play. For years as a U.S. congressman and then U.S. ambassador, I attended many global summits. We had them in Rome, and we had a number of people that would come there and heads of state, and we would sign these beautiful documents, and we said — we said it a number of times — that we are going to end hunger, or at least we're going to cut hunger in half by the year 2015. We're not even close. And we would forget about these documents, and then every five years we would wake up and say — oh, we've got to do this again.

A few weeks from now voters will head to the ballot box for a mid-term election that will set the tone for politics in Washington for the next few years. And the election will have a decisive impact on progress on hunger. I'm an optimist, but I am deeply alarmed by the partisan rancor and the super-charged rhetoric that I see taking control of Washington.

I'm an optimist even though I've seen so many things in the world that have absolutely turned my head. I've been to about 130 nations of the world, and some of you maybe have heard me tell the story — and I tell this story often because I can't get it out of my mind.

In 1984 I went to Ethiopia, and it was the time of a great famine. And what happened was is that they had a hideous government in power then, and they came in power by killing half of the cabinet of the ruling party before then, and they shut down the government, shut down at least the country to the outside world. And they were facing a drought; the drought turned into a famine. The famine after that had turned into a civil war, and it was six months before anybody could get in there to care and find out what was going on.

A million people had died in Ethiopia before we could get in there. And I felt, because I was chairman of the Select Committee on Hunger, that I needed to take a look to understand this. How can a million people die? How can that be?

And so I went to Ethiopia, and I was with Mother Theresa's group, Sisters of Charity. We went up country from the capital of Addis Ababa, and we were in a small clinic, probably no bigger than maybe two of these stages that I'm standing on, in the middle of nowhere. And as I walked into this clinic, there were thousands of people, Ethiopians, who had been walking for many miles. They looked sick, certainly malnourished, in trouble.

As I walked in, one of the doctors there (the only doctor, actually) grabbed me. He said, "Come outside. I want you to see something. And we can only take care of five kids here, because they're all malnourished, they're all dehydrated, and they're dying." And so I went outside with him, and people were handing me their children. They thought I was a doctor. And half the kids they handed to me were dead, and the other half were dying. And we could only handle five children. There were three thousand children there at least.

And I saw that for three days, and I was stunned. I couldn't talk. I felt like a zombie. I walked around Ethiopia different... They took me all over the place in Ethiopia. I could hardly talk, and I remember coming back on the plane from Ethiopia, that, you know, we do so much in Congress that really don't amount to much. And I was going to make my life count, and I was going to spend my time working on this issue, whether it was domestic or international.

And so that's what I've been trying to do. But I'm still optimistic, because when I come to a room like this and I see the Farm Bureau — I see the Financial Group come together like this and all the people, and the students here and people that are connected with the food banks and soup kitchens — I'm excited because you're doing something.

You're doing the thing that Mother Teresa said to me once. I had the pleasure of meeting her when she was alive. I met her six or seven times, and I asked her... I was with her once in Calcutta and the first time I met her and we went to this very poor region in the center city, and she was trying to show me some of her programs and how it worked.

And we went into this one street, and it was just packed with people, and people lying on the sidewalks, sick, and it was just masses of people. And here I am, supposed to be chairman of the Select Committee on Hunger, and I said to Mother Teresa, I said, "I don't even know where to start. I'm supposed to be chairman of the Select Committee on Hunger for America. I'm not even sure I can handle this block. Where does one start?"

And she didn't say anything to me, and she went and picked this person up, brought this person home and began to wash him off, and she got some help to bring him home and brought him back to her hospice. And she began to love him, as she did to everybody. She loves people, she touched them, she hugged them, she washed them off.

And she came back to me later that afternoon. She said to me, "Always remember, do the thing that's in front of you. We can't all come to Calcutta. Do the thing that's in front of you." So what you're doing here in Iowa, what you're doing here in the University, what you're doing here as part of the Farm Bureau — you're doing the thing that's in front of you.

You can't all go to Calcutta, but if everybody did what you do in this room, probably three-fourths of the stuff we do in government we wouldn't need to do. Mother Teresa said, "Do the thing that's in front of you."

I am alarmed, though, by some of the partisan stuff that's going on in Washington. A recent example of this is the Child Nutrition Bill that has been crystallized in the lack of leadership and bipartisanship in government. Politicians are kind of in a self-preservation mode these days. They're sacrificing, I think, what is right for the sake of political expediency.

We should all remember that President Obama's pledge to end childhood hunger in the U.S. by 2015 was first announced by his campaign at this very summit in 2008. And I'm sure many of you were here that day and were excited about a presidential candidate committing on our issues. And no one knows better than you that individuals and civic groups and businesses, they all have a role to play in the fight against hunger.

And we were excited that day because we also understood that the government must do its part too, because it's the only thing out there with the resources to turn this problem around. And as a down payment on his campaign pledge, the President requested an extra one billion dollars per year for child nutrition in his budget, and it was a good start. But without his continued leadership, the budget request, it becomes an empty gesture.

And last August, 15 months after the President's budget request, the Senate passed a Child Nutrition Bill with an additional \$450 million per year in our nation's school and summer nutrition programs. And this was a big increase — it fell short of what was needed, but it was an increase. The Senate did more than just come up short, though. They used a \$2.2 billion cut to the SNAP program, which was the food stamp program, to pay for the bill, and they did it with the consent and the urging of the White House.

So if hunger was a priority for the President and the Congress, then they should have gotten together to protect the food stamps and pass the Child Nutrition Bill, but they didn't. And as a result the bill got bogged down in the house, and they failed to pass it. Now we've got a continuation of the same old politics, and only

a small chance, a chance, of getting a bill passed once Congress returns for their lame-duck session.

When 49 million people in America, one in four children, are at risk in hunger and the number living in poverty is the highest it's ever been since 1960, this is simply wrong, it's outrageous, it's unconscionable.

This is an election year, and it's a time when most important issues facing our nation should be discussed and debated, and we've got to do a better job of educating our elected officials, our candidates. We know from our polls — the Alliance to End Hunger, we do polling — and our polls show that the American people are way ahead of candidates. They favor this issue of hunger; they really do, way ahead.

One in two voters say the recession has made them more supportive of programs to help hungry and poor people, and almost four in five say a candidate's support for anti-hunger programs will be important when they decide how to vote on November the 2nd.

I'm not just talking about informing elected officials. I think it also starts with our families and our friends and our neighbors and our colleagues. You know, for example, I'm amazed how widespread misperceptions are about U.S. foreign assistance. Four in ten Americans believe that foreign aid is one of the two biggest line items in the federal budget, when in fact spending has never exceeded .05 percent, never.

I had an opponent once when I was running for Congress who debated me — she was a colonel in the Air Force, just retired. We got into this question. Somebody asked this question about how much we spend on foreign aid for development assistance. And she said, "Well, it's around 28 percent of our foreign budget goes for development assistance." I couldn't believe it — this was a colonel in our Air Force — when it's actually less than one half of one percent.

Despite public support for foreign assistance, these kinds of misperceptions make us an easy target when times get tight. Soaring deficits should be a top concern. It is a top concern, should be. Fiscal responsibility is difficult, and it requires tough choices. But it should never mean picking our children last, or forgetting our moral obligation to the world's most vulnerable.

So much progress has been made, and we cannot let our leaders off the hook. Over the next week we can all take action by asking questions at campaign events, debates, writing letters, asking campaign staff to clarify candidates' positions. Go see your representative or your mayor, your state senators, your congressmen.

And when the campaign is over, get to know your congressmen and senators. Don't be afraid. You know more than they do about this issue. Get to know them. Go in and ask them. Put them on a spot, in a nice way. But they should know how you feel about this issue. Your congressmen and senators, they're good people, but they're busy people; and if you don't bring this matter to their attention... The way they think — and I'm an elected official; this is the way we think — if you don't bring the matter, if you don't bring this issue to my attention, it must not be important. Therefore, I can work on something else. That's the way most elected officials, people think — because they're busy. So we've got to bring it to their attention.

As director of the Alliance to End Hunger, I work with a whole range of our members that are working on development projects around the world — hunger relief in the U.S. and advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. Alliance members, like Land O' Lakes and the National Farmers Union, have been contributing to our mission of building the public and political will. In many ways they've donated dollars, but also by working with hunger advocates to make sure members of Congress know farmers and businesses care about these issues.

I know that you have to bring these issues home. And I remember when I first got elected I did some polling in my district, and I asked the people in my district — I had about 600,000 people — and I said, "What do you think of these issues: deficit, jobs..." whatever the top issues were in those days — defense, etc. Well, you know, hunger and poverty and foreign assistance rank last.

And then we brought these issues home, and we started all kinds of programs — pickup of food — we

started gleaning programs, we started food bank programs, we started the kind of programs that you do in this room. And we were able to change... We got people involved, and we changed things around. When I left office, I did a poll before I left, and I said, "Now, rank these issues," and hunger and development assistance ranked 2 and 3.

You can bring this issue home, you can make it important, and you can change things.

We're starting something at the Alliance to End Hunger, something that's new that I did in my old district when I was a congressman. We're starting what we call hunger-free communities. And what we're doing is we're reconnecting with congressmen and senators to go back to their district, reconnecting them to people in their district that are actually feeding people — to their farmers and to their co-ops and to their food banks and soup kitchens and faith-based organizations.

And we're saying — Wouldn't it be unique and interesting if in your county and your city you could say that nobody is ever going to go hungry again in my county or in my city? What if you could say that?

And this is the way we think we can build political will, is reconnect the mayors and the state representatives, but especially the congressmen and senators back to their district. And we're finding that this really works. And actually we're going to sponsor a conference next year — and it's going to be actually sponsored by a lot of the corporations that belong to the Alliance — and we're going to teach what it is to become hunger-free.

I'll just finish by saying this, that, you know, you might think that what you're doing is not making a difference, but let me just tell you this one story about Mother Teresa again. A reporter asked her, "Don't you think that what you do..." (This is a reporter asking Mother Teresa), said, "Don't you think that what you do is a drop in the bucket?" Can you imagine a reporter asking that of Mother Teresa?

But anyway, she said, "No. What I do is a drop in the ocean, but if I didn't do it, it'd be one less drop." If figured... can you imagine in this room with what you're doing here with the World Food Prize, the drops, by putting together what you're doing here, the impact that you're having just not only this city but on this state, it's wonderful.

I'm glad to be part of it and glad to be with you, and congratulations on a great week. Thank you.