

Living on \$3 a day for food

By The Denver Post Editorial Board

The Denver Post

June 8, 2007

It's been eye-opening, even amusing at times, to follow the trials and travails of usually well-fed public officials attempting to eat on a food-stamp budget.

They're loading up on potatoes, beans and rice and passing up items like coffee, fresh vegetables and most meat. It's tough to make ends meet on \$3 a day.

Colorado officials and others around the country have been taking part in the Food Stamp Challenge. Their efforts are drawing attention to the program as it goes before Congress for reauthorization in the 2007 Farm Bill. The measure before Congress would add \$4 billion to the \$33 billion food-stamp budget, an increase that would give a family of four an additional \$48 a month for food.

It's hard to imagine that the public officials who have been eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or skipping meals could have a more compelling demonstration of why an increase is appropriate.

Mayor John Hickenlooper was reduced to a dinner of a baked potato topped with Velveeta cheese and a business lunch in which he had to rely on the free rolls and a dollop of peanut butter.

Around the country, members of Congress and others concerned about hunger in America have similar stories.

U.S. Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass., who last month introduced the measure to increase spending on food stamps and other federal nutrition programs, took part in the challenge. On several mornings he relied on a single banana for breakfast and a cheese tortilla - consumed in four bites - for dinner.

It's been an interesting and challenging experiment for Hickenlooper, McGovern and others, but it's a grim reality for 26 million people who relied on food stamps in 2006, including 251,385 Coloradans.

McGovern's bill, co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, R-Mo., would strengthen the emergency food assistance program, reauthorize the commodity supplemental food program, and provide easier access for food-stamp enrollment. Only 60 percent of eligible households nationwide are in the program.

The measures, which would cost \$20 billion over five years, would address the often overlooked problem of hunger in America. A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture study found that 35 million U.S. residents couldn't reliably put food on the table. That's an abominable statistic for a country of such wealth and education. We urge members of Congress to seriously consider the measure - even if they never have to try to subsist on ramen noodles.