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THE FEEDING OF AMERICA

President Reagan should be bursting with pride on May 25 if "Hands Across America" becomes a reality. The message he has preached throughout his political career -- that people should help people instead of relying on the Federal Government -- will be visually demonstrated as millions of Americans hold hands from coast to coast in order to raise money to feed the hungry in America.

The $100 million hoped to be raised in this latest demonstration of celebrity activism is a lot of money. The motives of the participants are sincere, purposeful, and generous. The big question is, how will the money be spent?

Will it be turned over to commercial food service vendors who are eagerly anticipating the chance to make big bucks turning out quantities of overcooked, unnourishing, cholesterol-laden prepackaged foods?

A better use of the money would be to dispense bean soup at "teaching food centers" so that people can learn that nutritious and delicious food is so inexpensive and easily available that there is absolutely no reason for anyone in America to be hungry. Those who did not learn the food facts of life in high school courses on home economics can come to these "centers" and learn what to buy and how to prepare food for economy, nutrition, and taste.

For example, a package of dried beans or peas bought at a discount supermarket for 49¢ will make 20 substantial servings of bean soup. Homemade bread costs about 10¢ per loaf. A bowl of soup and a half a loaf of bread cost 8¢. Add an apple, banana, orange, or milk and one can eat a nutritious meal for as little as a quarter.

But you have to learn how to do this. You also have to resist the onslaught of advertising which lures people away from high-nutrition, low-cost foods to low-nutrition, high-cost foods.

The prepackaged meals provided in quantity for large numbers of people notoriously are made up of fried foods, processed fatty foods, pastries, and soft drinks. They tend

to dull our taste for naturally nutritious foods.

The damage done to children by the School Lunch Program is a national disgrace. Instead of serving children nutritious soup, good bread, raw vegetables and fruit, the children are bombarded with chips, fries, hot dogs, soggy and overcooked vegetables, all so loaded with sugar and salt that children never develop any taste for natural foods.

The poor are led down the same primrose path. Many poor people are overweight but undernourished from calorie-laden, vitamin-deficient foods. They have been beguiled into spending their food stamps and other limited monies on expensive junk foods.

No one needs to be hungry in our bountiful country when food here is so cheap, sanitary and plentiful. It is neither necessary nor desirable for the government to take on the responsibility of feeding people.

The $100 million raised by "Hands Across America" could not only eliminate hunger, but build healthier bodies if it is used to show people how to shop, cook and eat. The poor who learn how to live on a diet of inexpensive beans, peas, breads, vegetables, and fruits will then be healthier and have fewer medical problems than the rich who dine on steak, ribs, fries, pies, and artificial drinks.

Here is a recipe for a nutritious, inexpensive meal which my family enjoys: Six Bean Soup. Put one-third cup of each of the following in a large pot: split peas, lentils, navy beans, small red beans, pinto beans, and great northern beans. Cover with two quarts of cold water and let sit overnight.

The next day, add one more quart of cold water and put on the stove to boil. Chop one large onion very fine and add one cup of water (or use blender with one cup of water to "chopped" consistency). Add to soup. Reduce heat and simmer for three hours, stirring occasionally from bottom to top.

Then, chop or mash one 14- or 16-ounce can of tomatoes (or use blender). Add to soup with 1/2 teaspoon chili powder, 1 teaspoon sugar, 1 tablespoon of ketchup, and other seasonings to taste. Cook one-half hour longer. This delicious pot of soup is enough for six to eight people. Along with good bread, it is a whole meal.

If "Hands Across America" would use its millions to set up centers to dispense this soup, along with the recipe and demonstrations of how to make it, no one in America need ever be hungry again. It would prove that we don't need the government to feed people.