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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Setting the record straight on child nutrition legislation

When it comes to helping students succeed, there are few things more basic than making sure they eat and eat healthily at school. As a member of Congress and chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, I have worked hard to lead Congress toward this goal. The “Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016” is a major step forward in this regard, despite being seriously mischaracterized in a recent letter to the Journal & Courier.

That letter inaccurately stated that some low-income students would “no longer be able to access” nutritious meals under my proposal. To be sure: Our bill in no way alters the eligibility requirements for students who receive free or reduced priced lunches. Again: Not one student currently eligible for meal assistance would be ineligible under this proposal.

The authors of the letter are trying to scare you or, at least, have been terribly misinformed. None of them bothered to contact me with their concerns, either, despite having discussed these types of issues in the past and sharing common ground with them.

Under current rules, a school can offer meal assistance to every student if just a mere 40 percent are eligible. This means that schools can have taxpayers pay for every meal in a school even when a majority of students are not even eligible for assistance. By increasing that requirement to 60 percent, we at least make sure that a small majority of students actually qualify for the taxpayer subsidized meal, before taxpayers pay for all students to receive them.

These savings would be used to fund the many other reforms in the bill, such as a higher reimbursement for breakfast – a rate that hasn’t been adjusted since the 1980s. We will also use that money to streamline access to summer meals. These are examples of things the writers of the letter, and others, have said they wanted for years. Apparently, they just don’t like that with this bill we are able to do it without spending more of your money.

Rep. Todd Rokita R-Indianapolis

YOUR TURN

Submit letters to the editor of 250 words or fewer to editor@jconline.com or to 217 N. Sixth St., Lafayette, IN 47901. Please include your name, town and phone number, for confirmation purposes.