

Letter: What Rokita doesn't get about school lunch

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(Photo: Journal & Courier)

On June 7 hundreds of advocates from Bread for the World were scheduled to descend on Congress to let our representatives know that every child deserves the healthy food they need to survive and thrive.

If I were there, I would reiterate my concerns to Rep. Todd Rokita about the changes he made to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill sent over from the Senate. The congressman says that he is saving \$300 million dollars a year with his changes to the community eligibility standards, but surely he realizes that any savings means kids are not getting meals.

The Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science says that kids who eat school breakfast score 17 percent higher on standardized tests and have a 20 percent greater chance of graduation. So, even his false savings are "penny wise and pound foolish" in that they are short-term savings that result in the long-term expense of missed potential from children who won't do as well in school and may end up costing society more as adults.

Allowing schoolwide meals removes the administrative burden on schools to verify incomes for each student and makes qualified children more likely to be fed. When 40 percent of students automatically qualify, an estimated 67 percent would qualify if their incomes were individually checked. So leaving the standard at 40 percent already accomplishes the congressman's goal for eligibility.

Making sure children have access to the healthy food they need is not only the morally right thing to do, but also the fiscally responsible thing. You won't find a better return on investment.

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Your turn

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