

**THE STATE OF HUNGER IN IOWA**

*Cory Berkenes - Liesel Eathington - Lily French*

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**Stephen Lauer**

Program Coordinator - World Food Prize Foundation

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I would like to welcome our next panel to the stage. This panel is going to be speaking about the state of hunger in Iowa – so who’s hungry, why are they hungry – sort of setting the stage for then what can we do about it?

So we have Cory Berkenes, who is the State Director of the Iowa Food Bank Association; and we have Liesl Eathington, who works with the Community Indicators Program at Iowa State University, really digging into the economic and census data on hunger by county; and then we have Lily French, who works with the Iowa Policy Project and does some really groundbreaking work on “how much does a family need to earn in Iowa to have maybe a minimal standard of what we consider a decent standard of life?”.

So if everybody could join me in welcoming the panel to the stage.

*Panel Members:*

<b>Cory Berkenes</b>	State Director, Iowa Food Bank Association
<b>Liesl Eathington</b>	Assistant Scientist, Iowa Community Indicators Program at Iowa State University
<b>Lily French</b>	Senior Policy Consultant, Iowa Policy Project

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**Cory Berkenes**

I’m not sure how I always get placed behind Dr. Shah – he’s tough to follow. I am Cory, and I have not been invited to the White House before. I feel like I need to give us some credit now, but I’m the director of the Food Bank Association. We work with all eight Food Banks. I guess what I’ve been assigned to do is give an idea of who is hungry in Iowa – What does hunger look like in Iowa?

I’ve been in here in the past and given an update, so this will just be an update on how hunger looks like in Iowa. So I’ll give... Because I haven’t been to the White House, I’ve got to give a little bit of credit who I am and the Food Banks that we work with, so I’ll start with that, and then we’ll get into what everybody is here for.

So the mission of our organization is to coordinate the efforts to alleviate hunger in the state with the eight Feeding America Food Banks that serve Iowa. That’s what we do. We work on several different projects, the policy and advocacy side, the food and fund procurement,

disaster preparedness, food assistance outreach, as well as the collaboration and unification. We understand in the state that it takes everybody. Everybody in here knows that – that’s why they’re here; they think it’s a worthy cause. It takes everybody. That’s why we’re here, so the collaboration and unification – we can’t do it alone; it takes all sectors, all public/private. The states, how we are situated in Iowa – the Food Banks, we cover all 99 counties, over 1,000 nonprofit organizations that our Food Banks distribute food to, programs that they manage, too, for the state.

So hunger in Iowa. Here is the Feeding America *Map the Meal Gap*, which you can go online and type “Map the Meal Gap” on Google, and you’ll see the state, and you can drill down to each county as well. So here’s the *Map the Meal Gap*. So in Iowa 12.6% of the total population is food insecure; that means they do not get the adequate amount of food every day for all household members in order to leave a healthy, active lifestyle. So that is Iowa today. Well, the 2015 report, which goes back two years, so there’s a two-year lag with that, but this is the most up-to-date numbers. That is 389,250 people in Iowa; 1 in 8 Iowans do not have access to enough food. I think we all understand, that’s way too many Iowans, and that’s why we’re here, so that’s great.

Now, childhood hunger. You can see the green, the different shades of green. The darker shades are the most food insecure counties so the most densely percentage of those that are food insecure. So Iowa, so child – would you think more percentage of children or more percentage of the general public is hungry? I’m always surprised – 19.3% of all of Iowa’s children are hungry. That’s 1 in 5 children. And I think that’s just not right. That’s outrageous. I think we need to do something about it. There’s a lot we can do. That’s why we’re working at the policy level, state and federal level with Feeding America’s staff on that. So we all understand that.

So going forward – I want to give a little back history of where we were four years ago, where we are now. A lot of numbers there, if you like numbers, if you like pictures, I’ll move to the next graph. Pictures – so this is zoomed out quite a bit, so you can’t see the change over the four years. But the top line, the green line, is the total population in Iowa, food insecure. However, it’s around 408,000 four years ago to right now 389,000, so about 13.5%, about 12.6% right now. And the childhood food insecure is below, right around 139,000 for the four years. We’ll zoom in. And the thing about graphs that everybody knows in here, you can make the graphs look however you want them to, so I’m just going to say – focus on the downward trend. Food insecurity in Iowa has gone down from about 408,000 to 389,000. I can’t tell you exactly why. I can say that’s really good; we all want to see that, and we hope it continues to go down. And I do, I do give credit, because that’s through all of our work in here. We see the need. We continue to create these innovative programs that are effective and efficient; and if we continue to work together, that’ll continue to go down.

So moving right along – look at childhood food insecurity. Logically you’d think as the insecurity of the total population goes down, its childhood food insecurity will go down, too. Though this is zoomed in quite a bit, the numbers are actually not statistically significant; but they are not seeing the downward trend as a total population. You know, there’s several factors that maybe we’ll discuss later today and the other panelists, Liesl and Lily, will address; but I’m just giving the numbers. We’re free to talk later. And at our booth outside, we have, like I said, you can drill down to each county. We have that at our booth. You can look at yours, your

certain county food insecurity rate, the number of food-insecure individuals; and you can go online to the Feeding America website.

Now, how does Iowa relate to national, across the country? So the top line there, the orange, that's the national food insecurity rate – or this is percentage now, not numbers, percentage – the national food insecurity rate. And then the bottom line is Iowa, so we are below the national average. But anybody that has any rate of food insecurity would say that's a rate too high. So we have been anywhere from 13.5% down to 12.6%. national is right around 16% nationwide. As Dr. Shah talked about earlier, it's a global issue; it's also a domestic issue, and we all understand that.

So who is hungry? You know, my original thought to this was to invite everybody on the stage and then have everybody out there to look, but then nobody would be out there to look. So I'm just going to imagine – imagine everybody on the stage, and then look around and see: those are the faces of hungry people. You know, there is no one face to hunger. You can't pick it out in a crowd. It's your classmates in school, your coworkers, the people at the gym, the people sitting by you at the parades. It's everybody. And I challenge everybody just to not worry about who is hungry, just to acknowledge that hunger exists – we know there's an issue, we know what some of the symptoms are, what the challenges are – and just to address those.

So I listed on there – just because I wanted to take up a slide and take up my eight minutes – the reliability of media. Now, I put this on there before the nice article came out this morning. That was a nice article. I will say not the reliability of media but reliability of their projection on how hunger is going nationwide, because it is an issue. It does exist in the United States. And just because the economy may be getting better according to the market, hunger is not getting any better; actually, it's getting worse, according to what I think. So the face of hunger – again, look around you. There's more... The Food Banks are seeing more grandparents raising kids, and that's not necessarily what you might think, but there are more grandparents raising kids that don't have that consistent income. Working families, retirees, families that are working families that have kids, families that don't have kids – it's everybody. And the medical bills – they're having to choose between medical bills, utility, heat. So it's choices; when you don't have as much, as great a budget, you have to make choices. And, of course, the cheap food but not cheap anymore – I think we understand that as we go shopping. Low-wage jobs – I know Lily will talk about this, the living wage – why is there a gap and hunger?

I want to pass it on to the rest of the panel. But the Food Banks are doing a great job with innovative programs, trying to reach the rural areas in Iowa, working with collaborators in the community, around the state. We want to create this environment that we end hunger together. It's a joint deal. We need a state plan. We need a community plan. It takes everybody on all levels. So the collaboration and unification – that's what we're here for. That's why everybody is in the room.

### **Liesl Eathington**

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. I was asked to participate due to my involvement in a project at Iowa State University, and that project is the preparation of county-level food needs and poverty profiles. We produced these for all 99 counties; they're updated about every two years or so. They contain dozens of indicators related to poverty and food insecurity. The

project is led by Dr. Kim Greder, and my involvement is to help curate the data that we include in these profiles. We try to keep it fresh. Some years we take some things out, some years we add new things, but we try to keep the information relevant.

The audience for the profiles is essentially anybody who's interested in this topic, but we find that they have their greatest usefulness at the community level, helping to raise awareness, helping to mobilize groups; and also because they're so full of data, they can be really useful in preparing grant applications. If you're not familiar with the profiles, I encourage you to check them out. You can just use good old Google and search for "County Food Profiles Iowa State," and you should find them.

But really what I want to talk to you about today is the information that we use to put in them. If you looked at the profiles, you might be very surprised to find that we only have maybe one or two indicators that directly address the issue of who is hungry in Iowa. And that's not an oversight, it's a data issue. And the problem is that we just do not have good data at the state level and especially at the city and county level about who's hungry. You may be asking yourselves—"How can this be? We're in the age of big data and data-driven everything." But trust me, it is true.

What I want to spend the rest of my time talking about is—"How do we go about measuring something that's so hard to measure?" And we could approach it from many directions. Most people would think the best way would be to measure it directly, but we can't do that in many cases. We have to use a lot of indirect measures, and I think that the two together really give us a better picture of hunger.

Now, what do I mean by "direct measures"? Very simple—we could study bodies, we could assess people's health, we could find out who's malnourished, we could ask them questions about what they eat and about their health conditions. Or we can approach it by asking them—"How are you able to meet your food needs?"—More of an economic approach. Both of these would involve one-on-one with people, either through surveys or examinations. The problem is that these types of studies are expensive, they're difficult, they're complicated, they're very intrusive, and for the most part, we can only get this information at the national level, it's very difficult to find it at the state level, nearly impossible to find it for any particular community or county.

So that's where we go to these indirect measures. I've got several sources here that we use to measure the problem indirectly. The first would be administrative data. An example would be usage of Food Banks or participation in food assistance programs, eligibility for free and reduced school lunch. So this is one method that we use to evaluate over time indirectly who might be hungry. The reason I say this is indirect is these programs tell us who's using or who's obtaining assistance but not who isn't. So we still haven't quite captured the need.

Another way we could look at it is with geographic data. An example of this would be your food desert research where you can look at the distribution in space of grocery stores. You can compare it to the distribution of the population and especially groups in need, and you might be able to identify geographically where there may be some issues with people obtaining just simple access to food.

And then the third way would be through household surveys that collect information about a whole host of other social and economic indicators, and that's really what I mostly rely on. An example would be... The best example is the American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau that collects information about all kinds of things. Here's some examples of them. So a lot of these are characteristics of the population that we know, whether through research or observation or common sense, are related to food insecurity. So do we have a large population in a region with a lot of children or elderly? Do we have certain minority groups or recent immigrant groups? Do we have people who haven't obtained a high school diploma yet or not a college degree? Do we have a large unemployed population or low wage workers or a lot of part-time workers? Do we have people, a lot of people in poverty? Or do we have a lot of families, say, that are led by single parents and have young children at home? All of these are factors that we know are related to hunger. So if we can get a handle on some of these other factors using census data, then we might be able to pinpoint areas of need and then also maybe identify trends and identify need over time.

Another approach that we can take is to look at household level indicators. As Cory mentioned, we've got a lot of competing uses for a dollar in a household. Budgets may be fixed. Some of the biggest competing needs would be housing, transportation, healthcare and food. Now, we may not be able to measure directly the food stress issues, but there are indicators of families that have a huge fraction of their income that's taken up by their housing needs or households that have to send parents in two different directions a long distance just for work. Or we can also find households that maybe don't have access to health insurance or have high healthcare needs. If we know that there's stress in those areas, because of the tradeoffs involved in a household budget, we also can assume that there's probably some stress and some food insecurity in these households also.

So those are some of the ways that we try to use secondary data to get a handle on something that we can't measure directly. But there's tradeoffs with this. And so one of the things on the positive side of this indirect approach is that a lot of the data that we use are collected by government, either through surveys or through government programs. So we believe that they're objective. You know, these are not special interest groups collecting data; we don't think that there's a special agenda there, so we can be very confident in the objectivity of the data, which helps improve our credibility when we're talking about the issue.

Another on the pro side is the consistency. Again, because a lot of them are government programs, we know that they're collected the same way, for the most part, over time and across places, which lets us do a very good job of identifying trends or comparing ourselves to another state or one county to another.

And then the third is because these are essentially surveys or programs that are ongoing, the cost to us for using the information is low, and in many cases it's free. So we can get census data; we don't have to pay for it.

But on the con side, timeliness is an issue. We, a lot of times, are dealing with a lag maybe up to two years, so we have a really good idea of who was hungry or the indicators related to hunger, what it was like two years ago – not such a good idea right now. Another problem is reliability. Because a lot of these data are collected as a survey, and even though the national survey might be very large, by the time you drill down to a particular county, you might have a very small

sample size, which means a large margin of error, a lot of uncertainty. So it's really, really important to remember with these data to be aware that there may be some reliability issues.

And then the last—like everything else, it's not free of politics. Budgets, a lot of times when we have budget cuts, the first things to go are the budgets of our federal statistical agencies. Programs may be cut, eligibility requirements may be changed due to not enough funding for some of these assistance programs. And then finally, the data collection, the surveys themselves are controversial. Every year just about in the last few years, we've had measures introduced in Congress to discontinue some of these surveys. They're viewed as costly, unnecessary and then overly intrusive, a violation of privacy. So these are some of the tradeoffs that we're dealing with. And on to Lily.

### **Lily French**

Good morning. My name's Lily French. I'm here from the Iowa Policy Project, and I'm trying to give you a little bit of a background about why these numbers are rising in terms of food insecurity, why you're seeing more needs in your community, and to explain what we have developed. As Liesl pointed out, it's very hard to answer the question—Who's struggling? How many people can't get by? So that's what we've engaged in at the Iowa Policy Project. We've developed cost of living thresholds, actually, and I'll tell you a little bit about that.

But our research was basically to ask—"What does it take for a family to get by day to day?" If they're going to be working at least half time—we're assuming actually full-time employment—what do they need to cover to be able to remain employed? Secondly, how does this differ by county? If we just talk about Iowa in general, we can't be specific enough to say what's happening in your community. We also wanted to know not only "What does someone need to get by?", but—"How many Iowans are making it?" So we added into our study—"Are people falling above or below that cost of living threshold?"

And the fourth thing that we talked about—which I'm not going to go into today, but I'll let you know you can look on our website to get more information—is, "do work supports help fill in that gap between low wages and what people need to make?" So if they have questions about that, at the end I can answer them, but I won't take time on that today.

So basically I want to tell you what we measured. You need to know—"What does the cost of living look like?" And I'll tell you on the onset, we weren't really thinking about a thriving budget. We were really emphasizing a survival budget. So what we included was childcare for the children to be taken care of while the parents were working, clothing, and some very minor household necessities—toiletries, personal care items. Food—we assume that every meal is cooked and eaten at home, using the USDA low cost food plan, no restaurants, no drive-through; it's all cooked and prepared at home. Healthcare—we did assume that, in order for you to be able to go to work, you've got to be healthy. And with the mandate for health insurance, healthcare is in the budget. We do actually look down to the county level and look at what people are paying out of pocket versus employer-sponsored care, so we really do go down to that individual budget level at the county level. Rent and utilities. We looked at housing. We said, okay, "how much does it cost to live in this community?" And we took the HUD 40<sup>th</sup> percentile market rate. We didn't want to take the top of the line, you know, extravagant housing; we didn't want anything substandard. So we chose 40<sup>th</sup> percentile HUD market rate.

And then transportation. In Iowa we really don't have a solid public transportation system that allows everyone to get to and from work outside of some of our metropolitan areas, so we really had to assume someone was driving to and from work. And that's all we budgeted for, those basic things – childcare, transportation, clothing, food, healthcare and housing. That's it – and taxes, because everyone pays taxes.

What are some things that you think might be missing from that budget? And anyone can throw out ideas here.

Q Entertainment

A Entertainment – so there's nothing for you to have some entertainment or your children to have entertainment. Other things missing?

Q Extracurriculars

A Extracurriculars – there's no soccer practice, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H; there's nothing like that.

Q Fees associated with school

A There are no fees associated with school, so the textbooks you have at the beginning of the year, the school pictures; none of that is budgeted for.

Q Surprise expenses

A Surprise expenses – there's no emergency fund built in here, and we all know that happens. And by this budget, it also assumes that you're working every hour that you need to work through the year, or you've got paid sick leave. So think about that as well – there's no emergency fund if anything goes awry.

Q Retirement savings

A Retirement savings – there are no savings, retirement for yourself, future training for your children, college education, or skills advancement for you as a worker; no savings.

Q Telephone

A Telephone is actually included – it's a household expense – not cell phones but they include a basic landline for safety purposes.

Q Debt repayment

A Debt repayment – again, this assumes that you've made it through life to this point, and you have no debt anywhere, credit cards, student loans or anything.

So as you can see, this really is a survival budget. This is not even what we would advocate for people. Nothing is national; it's all national data, but they're not national numbers. This is Iowa data, and where we can drill down to the county level, we do, and most of these are county

level. But even at that conclusion – and this is for a single-parent family with one child in the state of Iowa. It’s not the state of Iowa – it’s Polk, Dallas and Warren Counties – so kind of this region that we’re in right now. That parent, if they were to have health insurance covered by their employer, they would need to earn \$21.09 an hour, supporting one child. If they had two children, that would go up to needing to earn over \$28 an hour. Remember what I just told you we were measuring. This isn’t gifts for the children, it’s not your retirement, it’s not an emergency fund – it’s how do we get to work and home and keep the lights on and keep ourselves and our children safe and healthy.

Oh, I apologize. The numbers I gave you were if they did not have employer-sponsored health insurance. I misspoke. With employer-sponsored health insurance, if they had one child, it would be \$20 an hour, so you take a couple dollars off an hour, and also for two children it would be close to \$27 an hour. So when you’re thinking about minimum wage, you know, being 7.25, we’re talking more than two minimum wage jobs for a single parent.

Let me go forward here for a moment and just say we have this for 21 family types, which I won’t do to you today, and they would pull me off the stage. I’ll just show this other family type, and this is a two-parent family with two children. And the first column shows what happens if one parent works and one parent is able to stay home; they don’t have some of the same expenses, right? Childcare expense is taken out, transportation expenses are taken out. However, two-parent family, two children, one working without employer-sponsored health insurance, that parent is going to need to earn \$25 an hour. And if they do have employer-sponsored health insurance, if they’re fortunate to have that, they need to earn a little over \$20 an hour. If both of them are working, it’s not just you split that \$25. Actually childcare costs go up, transportation costs go up. So if both parents are working without employer-sponsored health insurance, they’re going to need to earn about \$17 apiece an hour. And if they do have employer-sponsored health insurance, it’ll be \$15 apiece.

Are there any reactions to these numbers? Yes.

Q Even with healthcare, the monthly healthcare savings seem low. You’re still not dealing with; I don’t know if your numbers take into account if you have a hospitalization. And then you go - you get an individual max of \$2000 dollars possibly, a family max of \$5000 possibly. So even if you’re making those figures, you’re one hospitalization away from crisis even if you’re making \$25 or \$30 an hour.

A Right, you’re absolutely right. And people have looked at these numbers for a long time, and they’ll say, “Where are you going to find childcare in my town for two kids for \$937?” It’s true – we took conservative estimates. We made every choice to say – how could you make it work? So those are home-based, not center-based. It’s not infant care; it’s more expensive. These are valid numbers, they’re Iowa numbers, but they’re on the lower end. At that level, we still need \$25 an hour or, minimum, at least over \$20. That’s a different picture than Iowa had five years ago. Okay, the point of this is that every year – and we’ve been doing this since 2008 – every year it goes up to live in our community. Every year the cost of these things for the last eight years have gone up.

So I wanted you to know that we have this information for all 99 counties. It is available online at the [IowaPolicyProject.org](http://IowaPolicyProject.org). If you’re from a different area of the state, if you have colleagues



from different areas of the state who might be interested in this, we do have it available at the county level. The most important... Or not the most important thing. The next step – and legislators actually asked us this for the first two years that we put this out – they said this is great, this is so helpful, but we want to know how many people are struggling – an important question and maybe the most valid question.

So we've been able to, in our last two iterations of the study, actually measure – here's the cost of living threshold. Now how much are families actually making, and are they getting by? And what we found is that all households, 17% of all Iowa households who are working at least half time – so that means people who are working full time, some people who have multiple jobs – 17% of them are not earning enough to get by at that very basic survival level. This does not count unemployed households, and this does not count underemployed. Like I said, everyone's got to be working at least half time or greater. So that's almost, not quite, it's almost, so it's about 1 in 6 households in Iowa are working and not earning enough to get by.

It varies across groups. You say, okay, well, what groups are doing better, what groups are struggling more or worse? And what we see is that married couples without children are faring the best; they don't have those additional expenditures. Still, 5% of them or 1 in 20 would be struggling with their work efforts and not earning enough. Single parents are struggling maybe the greatest amount, and it's nearly 60%, so almost 6 out of 10 single parents are working more than half time and not earning enough to get by. And this is based on – not projections – this is based on what Iowans are actually earning.

The reason why this is happening... Someone would say – “How can that be? How can 17% of our working families in Iowa – whether they're single, married, have kids or don't have kids – how can they not be earning enough?” And this is why: You put it against the wages that are available in our state. Our wages are not keeping up with the costs, and that's what is happening. What you can see, or what measures that is, I've just shown one slide to show you what the median wage is in Iowa. Median means half the wages in the state are more than that, half the wages in the state are less than that. So we think it's a good kind of standard measure. It's the red mark across the line. And you'll see that everyone who has a child is not earning enough at the median wage level unless they have two adults working. So if there are children in the household, you need two adults working at the median wage level – again, we're not talking below that. Half the jobs in the state pay less than that. We're not talking minimum wage. So it's not really keeping up. Single people are able to get by at the median wage, and married couples that have two workers and one child are able to get by at the median wage. Even at the median wage, if you have a married couple, they're both working, if they have more than two kids, they're not. So when folks were saying working families, retirees, grandparents taking care of kids – this is everybody, because this is the wage structure that's available to everyone.

The last thing that I want to share with you, because I've got 19 seconds, is – “How big is the gap?” It's probably not surprising to you that there might be a difference. When you see different groups struggling more financially or less financially, the same thing happens in how far below that threshold they fall. And what we see is that this is the average amount across the state; this isn't down to the county level. Single people, when they fall below that line, are actually falling below almost \$10,000, just a little less than \$10,000 a year. Married couples

without children, it's close to \$11,000 they're short. Married couples with children under 18, they're above \$16,500. And single parents are short over \$21,000 a year. So these are major and significant tradeoffs that families are having to make. Going to the food reservoirs, you know, is an easy and quick way to bring down the food expense. But there are lots of tradeoffs that are going on in the lives of people who are all around you, and it's pervasive, and at this point it's been a continuing trend.

So I'm going to stop there, and we turn this over to questions.

## Q&A

Lily Are there any questions for any of us? Yes.

Q I realize there are issues dealing with the quality of food

Lily Do either of you address what kind of quality of food or nutrition?

Liesl There is something called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and you can get information at the county level that does look at some of those characteristics. We can find information on diabetes, overweight and obesity. These are what are called synthetic estimates, and it's very similar to what I talked about. We take the demographic profile of a county, then we take what we know about the incidents of these types of disease among the general population, and then we put those two things together to come up with estimates for our counties of how many people are overweight, obese, diabetic, etc. But as to direct data measuring the health of people, especially those who also are food insecure, I'm not aware of broadly available data that would be more specific to particular initiatives, particular surveys. So does that answer? Basically, we don't know.

Q: Doesn't this data underscore the necessity of raising the minimum wage?

Lily Oh, man, that's a heavy question. Okay, so the question... Wow, I'm just still reeling how to answer that. The question was – Doesn't this data underscore the necessity of raising the minimum wage? And why aren't we there yet? I can answer the first part. I believe, yes, it does underscore the necessity of increasing wages in our state through a variety of strategies. And if we had more time and you were interested in my thoughts, I would tell you all of my policy recommendations – and they are publicly available online, I can tell you that as well. Yeah, as costs continue to go up, people have to find a way to pay for them, so I think Iowa has had a trajectory of wages declining for a variety of reasons – we've lost manufacturing jobs, there's global competitiveness. There's a ton of things that have led to this. But we have to look at what has worked in other states in order to turn that around, because the people who are out doing the work and pulling down the wages can't influence that. So I think this does call for a policy intervention, and I think it's honestly going to take the people in this room carrying that message to those who represent you to say it's important. There is a lot of pushback, and there's a lot of fear from the other side – if we raise the wages, what's going to happen? Are we going to run businesses out of town? And there's a lot of that dialogue. So I think it's really important for people who care about this to take it to their local elected officials

and federal elected officials and say – This is a necessity for us. We are working to the bone, and we cannot make ends meet. And guess what – it’s happening now in 1 in 5 households in our state.

Q In response to that comment, a recent article talked about the response of businesses to the raising of the minimum wage is to turn to robotics, to invest in robotics to take the jobs that...

Lily To go to automation?

Q Right.

Lily Yeah, I wish I were an economist, and I’m not. I do know that there is information out there – you can look at what other states have done. I think anytime you’re asking people to do something that’s fundamentally different and that will have a financial impact on them, whether that’s a business owner or a stockholder, it’s going to be uncomfortable. And I think as a community we have to figure out what our solutions are – because people are working, and they’re not just working one job; they’re working multiple jobs. And what is the trajectory to get from where they’re at – minimum wage, \$10 an hour, \$12 an hour – how do we get from there to 25? And again there are strategies in other states that have worked, so there are examples of what can be done from a policy response.

Liesl And I’m not an economist, but I do work in the Department of Economics. So on the issue of automation, one of the things that we’re finding about automation is it’s not necessarily replacing the low wage jobs – it’s replacing more of the middle-skilled jobs. So even if we did go to automation, we still have a lot of service jobs and lower-wage jobs that’s not going to affect, so we can’t dodge the issue with automation.

Lily Right, and Peter Fisher – I’m going to plug him a little bit. If you want more information, he is the research director at IPP, and he also is a trained economist, so he could answer some of those questions. There is another question.

Q I had a question for Ms. Eathington. What about recruiting the food pantries into this, say, first of every month, you ask people if they will participate in a survey for your data, and maybe the people that are attending the pantries might do it for maybe a couple extra items that they get?

Lily Yes, all of these types of efforts would be of huge help. And, fortunately, even though I mock the age of big data, I think that our advances in information technology and information sharing are going to make that type of initiative more possible, more feasible. So I think that’s a great idea. We’ve got some examples of partnerships between government agencies and businesses, of sharing data to help inform policy; so I think that is a great idea.

Q I just wanted to mention some of the other options besides raising minimum wage, which I think we absolutely must do, is to increase the amount of work supports available to families – childcare assistance, things of that nature. And I guess that’s what

I've always said is we have really two choices: We raise the wages to meet the needs, or we increase taxes to be able to provide work supports.

Lily Thank you very much for your comment, and that gives me a perfect opportunity to show this slide, which I said I wouldn't do unless asked, so there you go. We do analysis that looks at that. You're right – we either have to figure out how we support people to fill in those gaps between the work efforts and what it costs to live in our communities, or we've got to raise the wage base. And we do analysis that shows exactly what you're talking about. Each one of these colored things on top of the purple at the bottom are the public work supports that are available to help Iowans earn enough and stay employed. And you can see they just about get to that basic cost of living threshold for this family at about, right short of \$50,000 – it's about \$48,000 – but they hit a really big cliff with childcare systems; it's our biggest gap in terms of work support. Right about \$12 an hour, parents lose that childcare assistance, and they lose, you know, thousands, over \$6,000. Well, oh, here – this is two kids, so it's \$9,000 but plummets way down. And you'll see that that family does not make up those lost wage supports until they're all the way up to \$25 an hour. So what's our trajectory to get someone from \$12 to \$25 an hour? And if you wanted to do advocacy on the work support front, I would really encourage you to go to the Iowa Policy Project website. We have all this outlined, so you can understand these cliffs, but to talk with your policymakers about childcare assistance expansions first and foremost.