

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES
and RELATED AGENCIES
FIELD HEARING: PRESERVING AMERICA'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

STATEMENT OF THE REVEREND MARK A. ANDERSON

Chairman Harkin, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am anxious to describe for you the work of a unique new joint venture. "Barnabas Uplift" is an independent, not-for-profit corporation formed out of a partnership of the churches in Iowa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its social service agency, Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI); the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Dubuque and its agency, Catholic Charities; Muslim American Services; and Iowans for Social and Economic Development (ISED). We are also assisted by friendly institutions including Wartburg College, and our community colleges.

I would like to describe all aspects of Barnabas Uplift but, because of our limited time together, I will narrow my remarks to the "Help4Health" Program. Senator, "Hunger In America 2010ⁱ" is the first research study to capture the significant connection between the recent economic downturn and an increased need for emergency food assistance. This study released by Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, reports that at least 40,000 people, including over 16,000 children and almost 4,000 seniors, receive food assistance each year just through the Northeast Iowa Food Bank and its member agencies. In Iowa, 1 in 8 individuals are experiencing food insecurity, meaning that they lack consistent access to adequate amounts of nutritious food.

Barnabas Uplift is second to none in its appreciation for food banks and community meals. But handouts and soup kitchens can only address the symptoms of hunger and not the root cause. Why are people hungry? It is not because there is a food shortage. It is because they cannot afford to buy food. We cannot end hunger until we end poverty. One of the ways Barnabas Uplift fights poverty is by removing the barriers to job training and placement for the poor with a special emphasis on outreach to the rural poor. Our outreach strategy, of course, includes utilizing the social service providers at ISED, LSI and Catholic Charities to invite their existing clients to apply for this program. However, it also uses pastors, priests, and Imams to ask their flocks to seek out members, children, grandchildren, neighbors, students, anyone in the community who needs a boost up the ladder of success. Once a potential client has been screened, they are invited to be trained as Certified Nursing Aids (CNA). In our metropolitan areas, the students are simply given a scholarship to attend one of our fine community colleges. In rural areas, a teacher is brought to the town and classes are held in church basements, nursing homes, and community education centers. In some communities, church members provide childcare and even a meal for the student and the student's whole family so class can continue into the evening. Staff people we call "coaches" work along side the instructor to support and encourage the student through to completion.

The program's independent interim evaluation documents that already our outreach strategy was successful in recruiting 187% of our goal. To date, 122 students have successfully completed the training. Senator, of those 122 who completed the program, 95.9% have been successfully placed in a job in the health care industry. That means 117 Iowa households that existed at or near poverty level now have a regular income. Serving as a CNA is both physically and emotionally challenging but many nursing homes and hospitals reward competent CNAs with tuition reimbursement for those who wish to continue their studies to become LPNs or even RNs. So, we see the CNA training as not a first job but a first step in a career.

The federal government has made a small financial investment in the Help4Health program through a federal allocation sometimes called an "earmark" which you, Senator Harkin, helped us to secure. Since the classroom space, meals, daycare, graduation parties, mentoring, outreach, and much more are all donated by the community, there is only a small administrative cost above the approximately \$700.00 tuition per student. This is what the "earmark" pays for, tuition and some administration. Just imagine, for about \$700.00 a household can be made independent of monthly support checks from the government. These funds not only help these families but also provide desperately needed workers to care for the sick and elderly, and transform households from tax payer supported to being tax payers. Of course, the smaller the community the larger the impact, for example, if we can help 10 people in Oelwein move from unemployed to gainfully employed, that makes a big difference for both the families and community. This is often an investment that pays for itself in a matter of weeks.

Unfortunately, the media has sometimes portrayed these "earmarks" as free money frittered away. The reality is much different. The good stewardship of this public money is continually monitored including goals and timelines to meet, regular reports to submit and even inspections. Each and every penny must be accounted for and every obligation met.

Senator, you should know that in the communities of Iowa Falls, Radcliffe and now Postville, individual donors are so inspired by the federal government's support they are personally financing the program in their own communities out of their own pockets. On the other hand, because the allocation your office helped us with to continue this work did not pass the house in the omnibus bill, for many cities this program will soon come to an end.

¹ <http://feedingamerica.org/faces-of-hunger/hunger-in-america-2010/hunger-report-2010.aspx>