

KENT CONRAD, NORTH DAKOTA, CHAIRMAN

PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON  
RON WYDEN, OREGON  
BILL NELSON, FLORIDA  
DEBBIE STABENOW, MICHIGAN  
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND  
BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT  
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND  
MARK R. WARNER, VIRGINIA  
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON  
MARK BEGICH, ALASKA  
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE

JEFF SESSIONS, ALABAMA  
CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, IOWA  
MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING  
MIKE CRAPO, IDAHO  
JOHN ENSIGN, NEVADA  
JOHN CORNYN, TEXAS  
LINDSEY O. GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA  
JOHN THUNE, SOUTH DAKOTA  
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO  
PAT TOOMEY, PENNSYLVANIA  
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6100

MARY ANN NAYLOR, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
MARCUS PEACOCK, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
[www.budget.senate.gov](http://www.budget.senate.gov)

July 18, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The USDA has an ongoing partnership with the Mexican Government as part of a campaign to increase food stamp enrollment among both citizen and non-citizen immigrants, including those who may only reside in the country part-time. My Budget Committee staff recently asked USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to furnish materials relating to this partnership and the expenditure of taxpayer dollars, such as SNAP literature that is being distributed through Mexican consular offices. Despite these requests, that material has not been provided.

I would therefore formally request that the Committee be provided with the following documents and information without delay:

1. All Memorandums of Understanding between USDA and the Mexican Government regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other USDA welfare programs
2. A list of all programs, meetings, or other activities involving USDA and the Mexican Government to increase enrollment, as well as a copy of all literature, brochures, posters, or other outreach materials distributed or displayed by Mexican consulates related to the food stamp program
3. Any internal documents regarding guidance provided by USDA to the Mexican Government concerning strategies for increasing enrollment
4. To USDA's knowledge, is any SNAP outreach information being distributed by the Mexican Government within its own borders?
5. To USDA's knowledge, are individuals completing applications for SNAP, as well as other related benefits contained on SNAP forms such as SSI, TANF, WIC, etc., within consulate offices?

6. How many non-citizen immigrants have been enrolled in SNAP in each of the last ten years?
7. Under current regulations illegal immigrants may obtain food stamp benefits for their household if other members of the household are deemed eligible but not for themselves. States must determine if applicants (or household members for whom the benefits are sought) are citizens or are qualified aliens eligible for benefits. Verification standards, however, vary widely. Applicants need only attest that they are citizens of the United States, and the state must accept that attestation as conclusive. Some states currently voluntarily participate in the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program, which allows administrators to run a simple check to determine if non-citizen applicants are eligible for benefits. States that do not use SAVE to verify alien status may simply accept the applicant's attestation of legal status as a substitute for verification or, alternately, may accept submitted documents without checking their veracity. Does USDA support implementing SAVE in every state to ensure existing law is enforced?

It is a sound principle of immigration policy that those who come to America be able to take care of themselves financially. This "partnership" and related consulate activity appears to assume that principle is no longer in effect.

It has become increasingly clear that the mission of the food stamp program has moved from targeted welfare assistance for those in need into an aggressive drive to expand enrollment regardless of need. To cite just one example, a character in a USDA-produced Spanish-language "radio novela" tries to convince a friend to enroll in food stamps even though that individual says, "I don't need anyone's help. My husband earns enough to take care of us." The first individual responds: "When are you going to learn?" Pride ought to be celebrated, not mocked.

The compassionate policy is not seeking to place the largest possible number of people on welfare support—pressuring, even intimidating, those who resist. Rather, the goal should be to help people move from welfare to gainful employment, to ensure benefits are targeted to those in genuine need, and to seek a future where more Americans are able to achieve financial independence.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Sessions", written over a horizontal line.

Jeff Sessions  
United States Senator