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H.R. 4870 -- The Healthy School Meals Act

Background

- In the past 30 years, the prevalence of overweight in children ages 6 to 19 has tripled. Today, 1 in 3 children are overweight and 1 in 5 struggle with obesity.
- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- Children are increasingly affected by obesity and related conditions like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, which were previously considered adult diseases.
- Children consume too much fat, saturated fat and sodium and don't get enough fiber, whole grains, fruits or vegetables.
- Most schools are struggling to meet the USDA nutritional guidelines: more than 70% of schools regularly fail to meet USDA's standards for saturated fat (less than 10% of calories) and total fat (no more than 30% of calories).
- According to the latest research, children who eat school-purchased lunches are more likely to be overweight and obese, and less likely to eat enough fruits and vegetables.
- Numerous scientific studies have shown the benefits of low-fat, high-fiber, plant-based options for adults and children.
- However, 80% of school districts do not have a single school that offered plant-based options at any time, according to a 2009 School Nutrition Association report.
- Under current law, schools are not required to offer nondairy milk alternatives to students who cannot or do not want to drink milk due to lactose intolerance, religious or ethical reasons, or other dietary preferences. As a result, many children are left without key nutrients during the school day.

What the Healthy School Meals Act does:

- Improves children's eating patterns by encouraging the inclusion of healthful plant-based options in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.
- Introduces plant-based foods to schools, increases their availability and affordability, and provides incentives for schools to provide healthful entree options in the lunch line.
- Removes restrictions on providing nondairy milk alternatives with school lunches, thus ensuring that all children receive vital nutrients.
- **Pilot Program:** Directs USDA to conduct a two-year pilot program to provide a representative sample of school districts with plant-based alternate protein products and nondairy milk substitutes at no cost to determine which products children like and are easy to prepare.
- **More Plant-Based Commodities:** Based on the pilot's evaluation, USDA will include identified plant-based alternate protein products and nondairy milk substitutes in its commodities purchase program, thus reducing their cost for school districts.
- **Incentives for Schools:** School districts that provide at least two-thirds of their students with a plant-based entrée option on their lunch menus will receive supplemental commodity assistance.
- **Healthy Milk Alternatives:** Schools will offer students who cannot or do not want to drink milk a healthful substitute that meets nutritional standards established by USDA for calcium, vitamin D, and other key nutrients and will be reimbursed.

H.R. 4870 -- The Healthy School Meals Act is supported by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, the Soyfoods Association of North America, and actress and nutritional advocate Scarlett Johansson.

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