

Berg to Congress: Save senior food program

BYLINE: The Times-Standard

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- Assemblywoman Patty Berg, D-Eureka, and Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, Wednesday urged congressional Democrats to reject a Bush administration plan to stop the flow of food aid to about 500,000 seniors, pregnant women and children through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.

"Of all the mean-spirited ways to save a buck, this pretty much takes the cake," said Berg. "We're talking about boxes of food for people who scrape by on a very limited income. I can't understand why anyone would literally try to take the food out of a baby's mouth to save what amounts to a drop in the bucket for the federal government."

Leno and Berg authored a letter that carries the signatures of 36 lawmakers urging that members reject Bush's plan to cut the CSFP from the budget. Berg planned to hand deliver it during a lobbying trip to the nation's capital this week.

The program helps feed nearly 500,000 low-income seniors nationwide with a modest box of nutritional foods. While more than 600,500 individuals qualify for the assistance in California, the program only covers a fraction of that amount -- 53,000.

The average age of a CSFP participant is 73 years old with an average monthly income of \$750 per month.

The food boxes, which are valued at \$50, cost the United States Department of Agriculture only \$15 to produce and contain items such as rice, cheese and canned meats and vegetables. While the administration claims that the program is duplicative because seniors could have food stamps instead, low-income seniors in California who receive Supplemental Security Income are ineligible for food stamps.