

Tony P. Hall Welcome Remarks for the 2018 Hunger Free Communities Summit

Good morning.

I am very happy to see everyone here this morning at the 2018 Hunger Free Communities Summit. The issue of hunger is something that has been close to my heart for many, many years; and Hunger Free Communities themselves mean a lot to me in a very personal way.

Back when I was a United States Congressman from Ohio, I witnessed the devastating effects of hunger as I travelled overseas, and was inspired by my experiences to take this on as a key issue. But as I learned more and took action to try to end hunger in places such as Sudan, Ethiopia, North Korea, and Eastern Europe, I also started to hear from my constituents back home. They would say:

“Tony, it’s great that you are ending hunger elsewhere, but what about us right here in Dayton? If you forget about hunger among us in your hometown, we may forget about you!”

And my constituents were right. When I looked at my hometown of Dayton, I saw one of the hungriest cities in America. My family has a long history in the city, and I found myself needing to do something about this problem.

I travelled all over the United States to other cities to see how they were addressing their own hunger problems. With the notes that I took, I worked with my congressional colleagues in the House Select Committee on Hunger to pull together a list of 14 key characteristics of a Hunger Free Community. I took what I learned back to my district, and we started getting to work.

I brought community leaders from all kinds of different sectors together – business, government, non-profits, churches, food banks, and others – to develop a hunger free plan for Dayton, and to put it into action.

It worked! Within a couple of years we had already made a significant dent in food insecurity. Things were looking great for a while. But then 2008 hit. Our manufacturing economy was devastated, and it took the livelihoods of thousands of residents with it. I imagine similar stories can be found within the communities that you all come from.

While I am not in Congress anymore, I am happy to say that we are finding a newfound hope in Dayton, and we are doing some exciting work once again to get us back on track to end hunger. Lela Klein from the Dayton Co-op is here and can speak to this as well. I hope you will get a chance to speak to her about Dayton and our Gem City Market.

What is really exciting is that through our Hunger Free Communities Network, and through this summit, we no longer need to travel the country looking for best practices and models. We can freely share what we know, and strive together to make our communities across the United States food secure.

While we come from different communities, and focus on the needs of our particular contexts, we are also very much in this together.

Thank you all so much for being here, and I look forward to a wonderful, thought-provoking, and inspiring summit.