

# ‘Prayer over partisanship’ creates hunger-fighting team

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WACO—Prayer and poverty brought together two members of Congress who seemingly had little in common.

But Frank Wolf, a conservative Republican from Virginia, and Tony Hall, a progressive Democrat from Ohio, “set a heralded example” of bipartisan cooperation in fighting hunger and advancing human rights, [Baylor University](#) President Ken Starr said.



Jeremy Everett, founding director of the Texas Hunger Initiative, welcomes participants to the Together at the Table Hunger and Poverty Summit at Baylor University. (PHOTO/ Ken Camp) Starr moderated a panel discussion on faith and public service involving the two retired congressmen during the Together at the Table Hunger and Poverty Summit at Baylor. The [Texas Hunger Initiative](#), a project in Baylor’s Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, launched in partnership with Texas Baptists’ [Christian Life Commission](#), sponsors the

annual summit.

Hall and Wolf acknowledged their deep-but-unlikely friendship defied the odds.

“If politics had been the basis of our relationship, it would have split us apart,” said Hall, who went on after 24 years in Congress to serve as U.S. Ambassador to U.N. Agencies for Food and Agriculture. “We had to let that go.”

Instead, the pair focused on their shared Christian faith and met to read the Bible and pray together.

### **Growing trust**

“At first, it was a little uncomfortable,” Wolf admitted. But in time, the two elected officials grew to trust each other—so much that when Hall told Wolf he needed to visit Ethiopia in 1984 to see famine firsthand, Wolf agreed.

“It changed my life,” said Wolf, who served 17 terms in Congress and introduced legislation to create the [National Commission on Hunger](#). Jeremy Everett, founding director of the Texas Hunger Initiative, serves on the commission.

Hall pointed to the Texas Hunger Initiative and other groups represented at the summit as examples of how people of faith can collaborate with the public and private sector to fight hunger and poverty.

### **‘We’ve actually cut poverty in half’**

“We are really making a difference. Globally, we’ve actually cut poverty in half,” said Hall, executive director emeritus of the [Alliance to End Hunger](#). “We are making amazing inroads. I believe we can end hunger by the year 2030.”

However, Hall challenged summit participants to recognize 48 million Americans go to bed hungry at least three or four nights every month.

“We have been neglecting our own country,” he said.

Wolf cited lack of educational opportunities and the breakdown of families—particularly in the nation’s inner cities—as key factors contributing to poverty and hunger. He voiced hope the National Commission on Hunger can “come up with a blueprint to end domestic hunger.”

Both Wolf and Hall talked about how committed citizens can influence members of Congress through handwritten letters and personal visits. Hall also encouraged young people to consider careers in public service.

### **Influencing culture**

But Wolf, the inaugural Wilson Chair in Religious Freedom at Baylor and distinguished senior fellow with the [21st Century Wilberforce Initiative](#), suggested people of faith may make a greater impact by influencing the larger culture than by seeking to influence lawmakers or by entering politics.

“Don’t think you have to be in government” to make a difference,” he said. “Congress is downstream from culture. ... Changing culture has an impact on Congress.”