



Health Tyrants

Do federal, state and local governments have a right to intervene in our lives when it comes to choices affecting our health? Recently, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to forbid restaurants from giving gifts with meals that contain too much fat and sugar, a measure aimed at McDonald's Happy Meals. The reasoning of these tyrants is to prevent McDonald's from using toys to lure children into liking foods the board deems non-nutritious. Fortunately, San Francisco's mayor, Gavin Newsom, by no means a libertarian, has threatened to veto the measure saying, "Despite its good intentions, I cannot support this unwise and unprecedented governmental intrusion into parental responsibilities and private choices."



If the board of supervisors gets away with this intrusion into parental responsibilities and choices, we can bet the rent money that they will not stop with McDonald's Happy Meals. The reason is that Happy Meals are not the only contributors to child obesity.

What and how much they eat at home, what time they eat and how much they exercise play a role. When San Francisco's Board of Supervisors sees that their Happy Meal ban has not produced the desired results, they'll seek to widen their reach. That might include laws that set purchase limits on non-nutritious items in the city's grocery stores. Depending on family size, there would be a limit on the purchases of delights such as Twinkies, Pop Tarts, lard, salt and other threats to good health. Maybe the Board of Supervisors would issue ration stamps that a person would need in order to purchase foods that threaten obesity.

There will be other challenges for San Francisco's Board of Supervisors. Not every California city has banned Happy Meals. Happy Meals lovers can just go across the Bay Bridge into Oakland or the Golden Gate Bridge into Sausalito to dine on Happy Meals or smuggle them into San Francisco. Maybe a Happy Meal black market would emerge. That means the board of supervisors might make random stops of cars coming into the city and have its police make Happy Meal arrests.

You say, "Williams, you're really stretching it; they'd never go to those extremes!" There's no limit to what do-gooder zealots will do to accomplish their mission. Think back to 1964, the time of the "First Surgeon General's Report: Smoking and Health." Back then, tobacco zealots called for "reasonable" measures such as warning labels on cigarettes and restrictions on advertising. Emboldened by their success in getting these relatively benign measures, tobacco zealots moved on to seeking bans on smoking on airplanes and airports; suits against tobacco manufacturers; confiscatory taxes on cigarettes; denying child adoption to smokers; bans on smoking in bars, restaurants and workplaces; even bans on outdoor smoking such as in stadia, public beaches and city streets. Had the tobacco



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zealots called for all of these measures, as a total package back in 1964, they would not have even gotten warning labels on cigarettes. That's the tyrant's strategy: Attacking people's rights to property and liberty on a piecemeal basis reduces resistance.

We Americans have given federal, state and local governments the right to interfere with any aspect of our lives when it comes to issues of health. So should we be surprised when an emboldened Congress enacts ObamaCare, even though most American were against it, that not only mandates that we purchase health insurance but will eventually control virtually every aspect of our health care? Should we be surprised when government tells us what food to give our children? Should we be surprised when government taxes soft drinks in the name of fighting obesity? Should we be surprised when governments order restaurants not to serve foie gras or cook with trans fats? If you think government has the right to look after our health, how far would you have it go? How about a congressional mandate for morning calisthenics, eight glasses of water a day and eight hours of sleep each night?

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