



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 16, 2010

## A Friendly Chat With the First Nanny

Every First Lady, it seems, has to have a cause. Lady Bird Johnson had her beautification program. Nancy Reagan had “Just Say No” to drugs. Michelle Obama’s cause of choice (or perhaps of focus groups) is childhood obesity.

Mrs. Obama held a live chat on July 13 on her website, [LetsMove.gov](#), in which she answered questions about her initiative that had been submitted via the web. (The video is archived [here](#).)

The primary goal of her “Let’s Move” program, Obama said, is to reverse the trend toward childhood obesity within a generation. Undoubtedly that is a worthy goal, but is the solution to the problem really to be found in top-down programs from Washington, which have failed to solve every other societal ill they have tried to conquer (and have created others in the process)? Obama clearly thinks so, and so do those who submitted questions for her.



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In truth, much of the chat was taken up with relatively benign, feel-good talk about nutrition, weight loss, and fitness — the stuff of the typical First Lady program, and little that the average American probably doesn’t already know.

Asked what advice she had to offer parents who both work and have little time to cook good meals or play outside with their kids, Obama suggested that families “make small, manageable changes in their lives” to improve their children’s health. Among the things the Obama family had done along these lines were trying “to cook one good meal a week” and prohibiting TV watching during the week.

In response to a question about how parents can help their overweight children without hurting their feelings, Obama said that in her family they try to “not really talk about weight” but to talk about health instead. An obsession with weight could lead to eating disorders, she said, “and we certainly don’t want to encourage the reverse trend.”

“Our message in our household is balance,” Obama said when quizzed on how to “incorporate treats but also stay healthy.” Treats such as the fast food the President is known to favor are fine on an occasional basis, she explained, but they should not be the mainstay of the diet. She also added that it is important for parents to model the eating and exercising behaviors they want to see in their children, saying, “We are our children’s best, first, and oftentimes only role models, so our goal is to make sure that we’re practicing what we preach.”



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Asked about how to make physical education less daunting for some students, the First Lady recommended talking “about physical activity as play, which is actually what it is.”

As the chat wore on, the questions and answers veered more toward how the government can effect Obama’s desired changes in children’s eating and exercising habits, with no concern for freedom or the Constitution in evidence.

One questioner, who teaches kids about nutrition and sees the “junk food” their parents put in their lunches, asked how to “educate the parents ... in nutrition, on how to feed their children.” Here Obama’s more patronizing approach took over, as she explained that parents may *think* that they’re giving their kids good food to eat — “I think we’re living in a time when a lot of people in communities don’t know what healthy should look like,” she said — but are being confused by small print or “big, unusual words” on food packages, so the government needs to force food manufacturers to modify “front-of-package labeling” to meet its standards of clarity. (Yes, the same people who wrote the Internal Revenue Code are going to make food labels easy to understand.)

Furthermore, she said that “in many schools teachers are sitting down at the table, having lunch with kids,” at which point they can both model healthful eating and encourage children to eat the vegetables their parents have packed or to “encourage children to ask their parents to incorporate vegetables” into their lunches. How many parents know that teachers are critiquing the lunches they pack or want them to do so? In addition, with ObamaCare’s establishment of national goals for obesity and “behavior modification” programs, it isn’t too farfetched to believe that teachers could be requested to report students whose lunches are not sufficiently nutritious by government standards, with penalties assessed on the parents unless they change what they pack.

Public-school employees have already become food police to a large degree. Schools give parents [lists of forbidden foods](#). A Texas third-grader was [given a week’s detention](#) for possessing a piece of candy. And in England, teachers “secretly photographed pupils’ packed lunches over six months and analyzed the contents,” after which they “awarded marks to the food and then showed their findings to outraged parents, offering them advice on how to improve nutrition,” [according to the Daily Mail](#).

Obama brought schools back into the picture when asked where to get good nutrition information, calling for quick passage of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act because it’s going to be “an important tool for us in the years to come.” (*A tool for what?*, one wonders.) The act would force schools that receive federal school lunch funding to have only federally approved foods in their cafeterias and vending machines.

Another person explicitly requested government policies to get what she wants: “Are there plans to implement new laws or tax breaks so we could get some nice, fresh, organic, cheap food here in [my town]?” Obama was happy to oblige with a federal program, the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, which puts up \$400 million of taxpayers’ money in an effort to eliminate so-called “food deserts,” generally low-income areas where there are no supermarkets.

The last question, asking what progress Obama expects to be made via her program in five years, provided the best opportunity of all to see just how extensive and intrusive Obama’s plans for American children are. Here is the First Lady’s modest wish list:

In five years I hope to see us making progress in our school lunches. I hope that we have a viable and well-funded school nutrition act, child nutrition act, and that we’re seeing the quality go up in our schools, we’re seeing more education going on around nutrition in our schools. We want to



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see more schools participating in community gardens and being the place where kids are going to get their first taste of fresh fruit and vegetables and understand how that grows. We want to see in five years the rate of physical activity go up in kids. We want to see more kids walking and biking to school. We want to see that number grow by 50 percent. We want to see that we're making some real, meaningful steps toward eliminating food deserts.... We want to see every major sports league in this country finding a way to invest in the health of our kids. I want to see every athlete, every Olympian in a school. We want to see chefs connected with our schools, helping our very valuable lunch room teachers figuring out how do we make meals healthy, and affordable, and tasty. And we want to see better information out there. We hope to have some good front-of-package labeling agreements worked out with the FDA. We want our retailers to be doing a lot more to improve the quality of their food. We've gotten some significant commitments from retailers that have committed to reducing the amounts of sugar, fat, and salt in our food, so hopefully we'll have a better array of foods. I hope that we're seeing more marketing of healthy foods to our kids so that we start seeing some of our partners like Disney and others taking a step and ensuring that we're having conversations with our kids in the venues that they love best, those Disney shows, and we're talking about nutrition.

All of this will require extensive funding and mandates, plus the concomitant bureaucracy to manage it all. None of it is compatible with a free society. Some of it is downright scary, such as the use of athletes and Disney shows to shove federal propaganda down the throats of unsuspecting youngsters. "Kids are malleable," said Obama, and she obviously intends to take advantage of that malleability to mold our children into her own image of what a good, healthy, physically fit child should be — and woe to the child or parent who acts as if it is none of the government's business.

"Let's Move" is the name of Obama's anti-obesity program, but it may soon become the rallying cry of the [increasing number](#) of Americans who are fed up with the morbidly obese nanny state in Washington and decide to chuck it all for freer pastures abroad.



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