



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 14, 2010

DOA Gives Money to Food Behavior Psychologists

First Lady Michelle Obama has made child obesity her platform and by hook or by crook, she is going to see to it that children choose healthy diets, even if it means undermining parental and individual rights. According to *The Blaze*, “Federal officials are turning to psychology in a new approach to get kids to choose healthier foods in the school lunch line.”



The United States Department of Agriculture will be giving \$2 million to food behavior scientists so that they may engineer and utilize marketing techniques to trick children into choosing fruits and vegetables as a healthier alternative to cookies and potato chips.

The Blaze writes, “Some of the ideas include hiding chocolate milk behind plain milk, putting the salad bar near checkout, placing fruit in pretty baskets and accepting only cash as payment for desserts. Another idea suggests using pre-paid cards that allow students to purchase only healthy options from the school cafeteria.”

The DOA’s website indicates that studies show these tactics work, as discovered by researchers at Cornell University. In fact, Cornell will be starting the Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs, a study center which will test more of these methods.

Part of the \$2 million will be used to fund 14 other research projects in Connecticut, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

A statement released by the DOA justifies the financial allocation, asserting that leaving choices to schools, parents, and students does not guarantee that students will make “healthful choices.”

“It is well recognized that understanding the value of a healthy diet does not always translate into healthy choices. Research has shown that good intentions may not be enough: when choosing what or how much to eat, we may be unconsciously influenced by how offers are framed, by various incentives, and by such factors as visual cues.”

The release adds, “The research can suggest practical, cost-effective ways that the school environment can better support healthful choices.”

The government’s use of behavior psychologists to influence an individual’s decisions is just another example of what conservative pundit Glenn Beck has dubbed the “nudge” effect. Beck contends that the First Lady is influenced by Cass Sunstein, Obama’s regulatory czar and author of *Nudge — Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

Sunstein’s book provides a variety of measures that can be taken in order to “nudge” Americans towards healthier lifestyles while giving it the appearance that Americans are in fact making the



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decisions themselves, through the employment of behavioral psychology.

One example that *Nudge* provides to help encourage students to eat in a healthier way is to place healthier food choices at eye level while unhealthier choices are placed out of sight. Sound familiar?

Sunstein has indicated that the presence of too many choices can be confusing to the American people. In describing the premise of his book, he virtually claimed that the American people were too ignorant to make proper decisions. "We think there is a little Homer Simpson in all of us. Sometimes we have self-control problems, sometimes we're impulsive. In these circumstances, both public and private institutions, without coercing, can make our lives a lot better."

There's good news, according to Sunstein, however. "Once we know that people are human and have some Home Simpson in them, then there's a lot that can be done to manipulate them."

Like Sunstein, Michelle Obama believes in using manipulative tactics to influence adults as well as children. In September, when speaking to the National Restaurant Association, she asked restaurants to include more healthy options on their menus and reduce the amount of fatty items used to prepare dishes. She suggested that restaurants replace butter and cream with healthier alternatives, and serve smaller portions to their patrons.

Claiming that Americans are "programmed" to make unhealthy choices through taste and advertising, Michelle Obama contends that it is the job of the federal government to re-program the personal tastes of Americans:

"The more of these [unhealthier foods] people eat, the more they're accustomed to that taste, and after awhile, those unhealthy foods become a permanent part of their eating habits."

In an effort to re-program the American people, an advertisement campaign was launched in Washington, D.C. that featured a man lying on a gurney, gripping on a fast-food hamburger. The man is rolled through a hospital past his grieving widow.

President Obama has jumped on board with the premise of nudging. In his 2009 commencement speech at Hampton University, he said, "I think we can all take steps to become healthier, and there's nothing wrong with us giving a little nudge in moving people toward the direction of healthier lifestyles."

Beck, however, and many other critics, fear that the "nudge" will soon lead to a "push" if Americans resist the "subtle" behavioral psychological techniques used on them.



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