



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on January 12, 2011

G-Men Go on Girth-control Mission

Item: “Thousands more children would eat lunches and dinners at school and all school food would become more nutritious under a bill President Obama signed into law Monday, part of an administration-wide effort to combat childhood obesity,” reported an Associated Press story on December 13.



Said the AP: “The new law aims to cut back on greasy foods and extra calories by giving the government power to decide what kinds of foods may be sold on school grounds, including in vending machines and at fundraisers. While the government has long had nutrition requirements for the free and reduced-cost meals it subsidizes, the bill would expand those requirements to cover all foods sold during school hours.

“Bake sales and other fundraisers that don’t meet the new nutritional requirements would be allowed during the school day as long as they are infrequent. The language in the bill is broad enough that a president’s administration could even ban bake sales, but Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has said that he does not intend to do that. The USDA has a year to write rules that decide how frequent is infrequent.”

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First Lady Michelle Obama, who “launched a national campaign this year against childhood obesity,” made the bill a priority, reported the wire service. “She said it is ultimately the responsibility of parents more than anyone else to make sure their children eat right and get enough exercise, but that government has a role to play.”

Item: *Upon the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, in prepared remarks, Mrs. Obama commented: “Military leaders ... tell us that when more than one in four young people are unqualified for military service because of their weight, “childhood obesity isn’t just a public health threat, it’s not just an economic threat, it’s a national security threat as well.”*

Correction: If patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel, that is right next-door to trying to make a national security issue of the purported epidemic of obesity. Doubtless the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists are quaking in their caves since finding out the U.S. government is on this latest year-long “national-security” mission to determine when or whether it will allow school bake sales. Does anyone really believe that more carrot regulations in school lunches will make American troops lean and mean?

Then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi gurgled that this extravagant piece of legislation had to be passed in the name of the children: “It’s about our moral responsibility to our children.”

Au contraire, it’s more about feeding the insatiable state, in this case to the tune of \$4.5 billion. For



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starters.

The engorged federal government's appetite for power apparently knows no bounds, with Washington now waging war on French fries and eviscerating the innards of vending machines in schools. Other federal campaigns have taken on such weighty matters as the amount of water that our bureaucratic betters will allow in flush toilets, whether to require photographs of corpses and other gruesome depictions on cigarette packages, and the effective outlawing of Edisonian incandescent light bulbs. Presumptive experts insist that their consciences shall be our guides — not through persuasion, but through the force of the central government.

Parents aren't up to the job, say the advocates of federalized food courses, but what is the *government's* track record? The deeper that federal officials have gotten into matters of personal nutrition, the more money and control they have demanded. As it is, the feds have been spending some \$15 billion annually on school nutrition and, to judge by their own moaning, they must be doing an atrocious job. But they hunger for more.

At least 62 percent of American schoolchildren who eat school lunches are provided with meals at no cost or at a reduced price. With all this assistance how can we be in such a stew? We must not have been aggressive enough with the roughage. Accordingly, we are told, no tantalizing item on the menu or in a vending machine will be too small to escape the search-and-destroy tactics of the Big Chef in D.C.

There was a time when James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, explained (in the *Federalist* No. 45) that the "powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined." He was not, needless to say, making reference to a responsibility to set the amount of salt permitted in snacks in local schools.

How did we come to this pass? We sponsored it. One in eight Americans receives federal food stamps (the program is officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP), along with one in four children. That is exclusive of the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program that now covers more than half of American infants. As columnist Mona Charen has commented, the WIC program is instructive:

It was enacted in 1972 to provide food, nutrition counseling, and referrals to health and other social services for needy pregnant and nursing women and their children up to age five. Who can be opposed to that? In 1977, as Douglas Besharov of the University of Maryland documents in a study of the program, WIC covered about 4 percent of women and children and 6 percent of infants. By 2006, it had stretched to include 30 percent of pregnant women, 51 percent of infants, and 25 percent of young children.

It should hardly be a surprise that the government, having taken over so much of our feeding, will decide what we shall eat.

Food producers find themselves begging to be allowed to sit at the federal table. Bureaucrats in Washington act as if they have some sort of royal prerogative and nod at those deemed worthy of their attention. At present, it seems, potatoes are not in high favor. As an Associated Press story put it in October, the Institute of Medicine, which is

the health arm of the National Academy of Sciences, recommended that the U.S. Department of Agriculture stop participants of the federal Women, Infants and Children program, known as WIC,



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from buying potatoes with federal dollars. The institute also called for the USDA-backed school lunch program to limit use of potatoes. Under an interim rule, the USDA agreed to bar WIC participants from buying potatoes with their federal dollars. Potatoes are the only vegetable not allowed.

We offer, free of charge, a name for the program: “No Taters, Tots.”

On the other hand, those who wind up in Washington’s good graces can find themselves riding the gravy train.

In addition, this is not just a matter of waste, but of waists — expanded ones. It turns out that government has been subsidizing the very problems that it now says it will solve. The farm payments to large agri-businesses for corn production in particular fall into this category. Federal farm policies, as explained by Cato Institute scholar Patrick Basham, are promoting the substance that anti-obesity campaigners call “liquid Satan,” a.k.a. high-fructose corn syrup. Basham, co-author of *Diet Nation: Exposing the Obesity Crusade*, writes in the *New York Post*:

A generation ago, the USDA began paying farmers to grow as much corn as possible. Today, subsidies to crops such as corn total \$19 billion a year. Corn subsidies total more than \$8 billion a year.

Cheap corn enables the corn-processing industry to profitably churn out an abundance of high-fructose corn syrup, selling it cheaply to food and beverage companies. The syrup, a fructose-glucose liquid sweetener, is a major alternative to sucrose (table sugar) first introduced in the 1970s. Meanwhile, the feds restrict the supply of sugar via import quotas on foreign-grown sugar — raising the U.S. price of sugar to two-to-three times the global level. With the syrup as the cheaper sweetener, the food and beverage industry has replaced sugar with corn syrup in thousands of foods.

The syrup is virtually the only sweetener used in soft drinks, for example. And thanks to farm subsidies, the cost of soft drinks containing it has fallen 24 percent since 1985.

High-fructose corn syrup accounts for 81 percent of the calories added to the diet of the average American in recent decades; U.S. consumption of the substance rose 120 percent from 1991 to 2000. More significantly, it rose more than 1,000 percent from 1970 to 1990, far exceeding the changes in intake of any other food or food group.

We are sure there are many well-intentioned public servants who believe this is all really just for the sake of America’s children. That is probably also the case with those running national Mao-style calisthenics programs in Communist China. But there are others with more mundane rationales, and they are often found in Washington by simply following the money trails.

One trail leads to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), whose boss Andy Stern is a White House favorite. As columnist Michelle Malkin has discovered, the SEIU fat cats have become prominent supporters of the First Lady’s anti-obesity efforts. She quotes SEIU Executive Vice President Mitch Ackerman: “A more robust expansion of school lunch, breakfast, summer feeding, child care and WIC (the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program) is critical to reducing hunger, ending childhood obesity and *providing fair wages and healthcare for front-line food service workers.*” (Emphasis added.)

Some 400,000 employees prepare and serve lunch to American school kids. The union is trying to snare a bigger chunk of these workers, pointed out Malkin last February. Expanding the federal school-lunch



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law “means a mandate for higher wages, increased benefits and government-guaranteed health insurance coverage (the more luxurious the better now that SEIU has negotiated its Cadillac Tax exemption from the Democrats’ health care takeover bill).”

At the same time, it is the taxpayers who are coerced into footing the bill to pay the bureaucrats to hector us about what to eat and to regulate what goes into the very mouths of our children.

This has also meant, writes Malkin, “Unionized school dietician and nutrition jobs are booming. And in addition to school breakfast and lunch, the SEIU is now pushing subsidized dinner plans and summer food service to create a ‘stronger nutrition safety net.’ Translation: Perpetual employment for big government and its public employee union au pairs.”

The bill of fare has become a multi-billion-dollar mandate, complete with omniscient sages and shining lights of intellect in Washington who will now decide whether Mom’s brownies sent to school for a birthday party are violating federal guidelines. Mrs. Obama, shortly before the latest food act was passed, wrote in the *Washington Post* that, “Changes like these are just the beginning, and we’ve got a long way to go to reach our goals.”

You need not just swallow this line. In this case, she’s telling the truth.

— Photo of Michelle Obama: AP Images



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