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OVERHAUL DIETARY GUIDELINES

One-third of U.S. adults are considered obese.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight.

Since the USDA dietary guidelines were first released, adult obesity rates have doubled, and childhood obesity has more than tripled.

The USDA guidelines have consistently recommended carbohydrates as the main source of calories in a healthy diet.

The U.S. spends about \$250 billion annually managing diabetes.

Roughly 25 million U.S. adults have diabetes.

Officials need to stop playing politics with our health and encourage Americans to embrace lower-carbohydrate, higher-fat diets

BY JEFF VOLEK
CQ-ROLL CALL

Later this year, the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture will release the latest edition of their dietary guidelines, which set the agenda for what Americans should eat to maintain a healthy weight, prevent disease and sustain overall wellness.

Since the guidelines were first released 35 years ago, various recommendations have come and gone. But the guidelines have been unwavering in their insistence that Americans consume the majority of their daily allowance of calories in the form of carbohydrates.

However, instead of guiding Americans toward better health, the results have been the exact opposite.

Since the dietary guidelines were first released, adult obesity rates have doubled and they are set to increase another 50 percent by 2030. Childhood obesity and diabetes diagnoses have tripled. Two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight, one-third are obese and roughly 25 million have diabetes.



Senators seek change

Current dietary guidelines are failing to make Americans healthier

Sen. John Thune, left, and Sen. Angus King are leading an effort in the U.S. Senate to revise USDA guidelines. They and 28 other senators sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell and U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack regarding inconsistencies found in this year's Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee report.

Our damaged health is also hurting our wallets: We spend \$250 billion annually managing diabetes, a number expected to double by 2020.

If the current dietary guidelines are failing in their sole purpose of making Americans healthier, and there are other scientifically proven approaches to having a healthy diet, why have they been ignored?

This is the question 30 senators, led by Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, and 70 House members, led by Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., posed in recent letters to Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell and U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack regarding inconsistencies found within this year's Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) report.

Both letters state that the current DGAC report ignores peer-reviewed scientific evidence that contradicts DGAC claims on what types of food – specifically red and processed meats – can constitute a healthy diet. Because agency leaders rely on the DGAC report to develop the dietary guidelines, the senators and House

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Obama noted that educating girls isn't only a humanitarian goal but also a foreign policy imperative.

First lady's focus shifts from nutrition to education

First-term first ladies are often shadows to their more-important husbands, dabbling in light fare to avoid criticism and picking safe projects to shield them and their families from the inevitable slings and arrows.

The safest bet has been to keep interests close to hearth and home – the universally approved place and role of women. Thus, first lady Laura Bush, who had been a librarian, focused on reading programs and, with the Library of Congress, created the first National Book Festival. Who, after all, could find fault with reading and books?

Similarly, Michelle Obama focused on subjects close to home. As a mother who cares about nutrition – and a fitness aficionado whose buff arms became the envy of sleeveless dresses everywhere – she planted an organic garden at the White House, changed the way children eat at school and created a “Let’s Move!” campaign to get our girth-some youth off the couch and on their feet. Who could be against nutrition and fitness?

As first ladies will tell you, there's never any winning. Critics are often scornful that these women aren't using their extraordinary profiles to tackle more substantive issues. In Obama's

case, they pointed to her Princeton and Harvard Law education, suggesting that she was wasting her mind on veggies.

But then, recall what happened to first lady Hillary Clinton when she dared tackle health care.

Second terms, which are often problematic for presidents, can be liberating for first ladies. In her second term, Bush became a harsh critic of the military junta in Myanmar and an advocate for jailed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, later turning her attentions to the women and girls of Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Recently, Obama created a “Let Girls Learn” initiative to ensure the education of adolescent girls throughout the world. Speaking Monday at a luncheon hosted by Lesley Jane Seymour, editor in chief of MORE magazine, Obama noted that educating girls isn't only a humanitarian goal but also a foreign policy imperative.

A series of secretaries of state, beginning with Madeleine Albright, have made this same



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observation and created policies and strategies accordingly. It is a fact that countries that abuse and marginalize girls and women also tend to be home to terrorists and inflamed minds snagged on ancient histories.

Adolescent girls were specifically targeted because puberty is when many endure the atrocity of genital cutting and/or are forced into marriage and childbirth while they themselves are still children. Into slavery, in other words.

In a brilliant stroke, Obama tapped the Peace Corps as a partner. Thus, corps volunteers, working with NGOs and other nonprofits, will mentor girls and help provide support to keep them in school. The first lady is also seeking partnerships with companies, congregations and schools. Corporate partners include MORE and its parent company, Meredith Corp., a media and marketing conglomerate.

At the same time, Obama is leaning on other developed countries to join the effort. The United Kingdom and Japan are thus far on

board. But she also wants to bring the message of “Let Girls Learn” to young people in this country. “Because I want kids here in the U.S. to know about these girls around the world, and I want them to be inspired by their passion and determination, to reignite that hunger in our kids here.” Amen to that.

Keeping our own kids in school is challenge enough, if for wholly different reasons. Whereas girls elsewhere sometimes risk their lives to go to school, our youth tend to drop out from boredom, lack of support at home – or even a failure to see the point of an education.

Perhaps it would help them to see girls in classrooms in Africa, as Obama described them – gathered in bare concrete rooms with little more than a chalkboard and rickety desks. “And they're thrilled to be there.”

These girls don't need motivation; they're ready, says Obama. What they need are desks, supplies, mentors, support from other nations – and safety. Having the United States lead this initiative is a giant step for girls in need, as well as for Obama, who seems to have found her voice and her own power to change the world.

– *Washington Post Writers Group*