From East to West, laughable obesity remedies fatten the news

By ACSH Staff — June 16, 2011

On the eastern front, we have yet another example of Mayor Bloomberg’s overreaching food bans this time, he’s targeting vending machines and concession stands in municipal buildings. His health police gave orders [1] this week to nine vendors, stipulating that they have six months to ensure that beverages containing over 25 calories per eight-ounce serving occupy no more than two slots on any vending machine. The remaining slots must be filled with less caloric products that are no larger than 12 ounces. In addition, those over-25-calorie beverages will be relegated to the bottom of the machines, a location known to have the lowest selling potential, while water must remain at eye level. The vendors are deeply concerned that these restrictions will drive them out of business.

This crackdown ostensibly in the name of fighting obesity is misguided and will do nothing of the sort, says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. Meanwhile, the measure will surely effect the businesses of these vendors, most of whom are veterans or disabled workers. ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom adds that determining the relative position of drinks in a vending machine was probably not what Madison and Hamilton had in mind when drafting the U.S. Constitution. This is government overreach in its most ridiculous manifestation, and it’s consistent with much of Bloomberg’s approach to individual health care choices that government knows what is best for us. Such pointless regulations merely make New York look foolish.

Meanwhile, brown cows in California (as well as strawberry ones, we presume) must really be laughing, now that the board of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has voted almost unanimously to ban chocolate- and strawberry-flavored milk [2] from school menus in the name of fighting childhood obesity. The proposal was inspired by popular British TV Chef Jamie Oliver’s criticism of the district’s choice to continue serving flavored milk, given the obesity prevalent among its students. A petition signed by 6,000 parents also helped sway the LAUSD to institute the ban, even though there are about 688,000 students in the district. The only dissenting board member, Tamar Galatzan, argued that the ban would be fruitless literally. She pointed out that the schools will continue to serve fruit juices, whose sugar content can exceed that of flavored milk: while the district’s fruit juice options range from 27 to 29 grams of sugar per eight ounce serving, fat-free chocolate milk has 20 grams per serving, and strawberry milk contains 27 grams. I really don’t understand why we’re letting a TV chef dictate our policy, she told the Associated Press. Many argue that withholding a flavored milk option will lead kids to stop drinking milk altogether and, therefore, lose out on its nutritional benefits a concern echoed by the American Heart Association.
Even more starkly illustrative of the unscientific mindset now ruling the fight against obesity debates are the so-called middle-ground milk amendments: offering milk that’s flavored using so-called natural sweeteners, such as cane sugar, beet sugar, or Truvia instead of high fructose corn syrup. This generated a hearty laugh from Dr. Ross. These activists haven’t the slightest clue what they’re talking about, he says, and yet they’re the ones leading our schools nutrition policies. Whether from high fructose corn syrup (a.k.a corn sugar) or cane sugar, the amount of sugar consumed through flavored milk which adds up to about 80 calories will have little to no impact on obesity.

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