

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2006

The Honorable Mike Leavitt  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

As you well know, America is facing an epidemic of childhood obesity and diet-related chronic disease. Today, nearly 15 percent of American children and teenagers are obese, a fact that has troubling implications for the health of our nation. For example, a quarter of children between the ages of 5 and 10 already show the early-warning signs of heart disease, and cases of adult-onset diabetes in children have exploded tenfold in the last two decades. Many experts now believe there is a very real prospect that today's kids could be the first generation in American history to have a shorter lifespan than their parent's generation.

While many factors contribute to the poor diets of American children, a growing body of evidence points to the aggressive marketing of junk food to children as a key factor. Several years ago, Congress commissioned the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences to study the issue of food marketing to children and to report its findings and recommendations to Congress and to the American public. After an extensive process of review and analysis, in early December the panel released its study, *Food Marketing to Children: Threat or Opportunity*. This report documents the rapid growth and increasing sophistication of food marketing to children. Even more importantly, the report found scientific evidence that food marketing to children has a significant impact on children's food preferences, purchase requests, and diets.

To combat the negative impacts of junk food marketing on our children's diets, the IOM Report outlined a series of policy recommendations designed to limit the exposure of children to the marketing of unhealthy foods, and to instead utilize the power of marketing to promote healthier diets. These recommendations did not focus on any one sector, but instead suggested courses of action for the government, the food and beverage industry, schools, and parents and caregivers alike. With respect to the federal government, the IOM said the following:

*The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should designate a responsible agency, with adequate and appropriate resources, to formally monitor and report regularly on the progress of the various entities and activities related to the recommendations included in this report.*

We agree that, if progress is to be made in combating the negative impact of junk food marketing on our children, the federal government must play a leadership role. For that reason, we urge you to immediately take such steps as may be necessary to begin this formal process of monitoring and evaluation. With the risks to the diets and health of our children well-documented, concrete action toward the goals outlined by the Institute of Medicine is imperative. Furthermore, information provided through the monitoring mechanism suggested by the Institute of Medicine is critical to Congress as it considers the need for additional legislative or regulatory action to promote child health.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your earliest possible response.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin

Bob Casey

Bill Clinton

Patty Murray

Chuck Schumer

Dick Durbin

Rowan Wyden

Marianne Comstock

Samuel Alito

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Patrick Leahy

Emery

March 8 2010

Ch. DM