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■ In my opinion

OBESITY 101: The Blame Game

Obesity. It's a common theme on news programs and in newspapers across the country. Everyone is puzzling over the nation's high level of obesity — as though it is hard to understand where the problem lies.

Each year, the average American eats 10 pounds of chocolate. Hostess produces 500 million Twinkies a year. Manhattan is home to nearly 100 McDonald's restaurants. The most popular meal ordered in sit-down restaurants in the United States is fried chicken. Need I say more?

It is blatantly obvious why we are a fat nation. I for one cannot sit through one more broadcast where a dubious reporter scrutinizes a French fry. Obesity has become a constant topic of discussion; everyone is trying to dissect the "epidemic" and it is driving me crazy.

Lately, a lot of attention has been given to the public school system and what it feeds children. Schools are now cutting back on soda and unhealthy menu items as parents demand healthy choices. It is great that people are finally paying attention to the food that's served, but not enough is being done.

When my high school began making changes to the food it served, the task was approached half-heartedly and with some backward logic.

The school removed the soda vending machines in the cafeteria and replaced them with fruit juice and milk. Great move; the milk became wildly popular. However, at least five soda machines remained elsewhere on campus. You cannot expect students to stop drinking soda just by removing cafeteria machines, especially not when all they have to do to procure a soft drink is to walk an extra 20 feet to a machine outside the cafeteria.

The salad bar was expanded and sandwiches were made ahead of time. This was also great move; it appeared quite a few students would rather grab a ready-made sandwich than



JESSICA DERLETH
FREEDOM RINGS WHERE OPINIONS CLASH

stand in line for pizza. Unfortunately, these changes did not prevent students from eating a basket of fries for lunch (a practice I have seen many times).

In a rather bold move, the snack bar was purged of several unhealthy items, such as the fountain sodas. The chocolate, however, remained.

I found this to be quite puzzling. What is the justification for continuing to sell chocolate bars when the cafeteria is supposed to be reformed? After asking a few employees, I got my answer: Chocolate contains milk. Yes, the chocolate was allowed because the presence of milk gave it nutritional value. With this kind of logic, schools will never be able to provide healthy meals.

Luckily, not all school districts conduct themselves with such contradictory thought processes. On one news broadcast, an elementary school with a reformed cafeteria menu was featured. The school was free of soda and candy, and the cafeteria had a well-balanced meal for every child. This school district — and others like it — should be applauded for spending large amounts of time and effort to set up a healthier food program. The school did not receive the praise it deserves because nearly half of the student population was overweight or obese. Which means that it became time to shift the blame.

In this particular news broadcast, a map was pulled up showing the location of the school in relation to area grocery stores and mini marts. For the next five minutes, these mom-and-

pop stores were closely examined and deemed responsible for poisoning our children with Cheetos and Snickers. Through some keen detective work, the reporter discovered that many of the elementary school children would walk home past these stores and purchase a wide array of fattening foods. But who is to blame for the children spending their allowance on chips and soda?

It is not fair to lay blame on stores that stock unhealthy food. Nor is it fair to point the finger at companies and fast food restaurants that make the products. These companies and stores are supplying the product that is in demand. If there was not a demand for fries and greasy cheeseburgers, McDonald's would not be selling them.

When it comes to obesity and eating habits, the responsibility lies with the individual and the parent. At this point, with media coverage and movies such as "Super Size Me," it is safe to assume the average adult has some concept of which foods are unhealthy. It is also easy enough, with public libraries and free Internet access, to determine what is OK to eat. I do understand how it can be hard to go with the healthy choice, especially when bad eating habits have already been established. But the only option is to realize the importance of eating well, and to establish better habits in today's children. The parents are responsible for their child's eating habits, just as they are responsible for their own diet; if a child is taught what to eat and why, he or she will be more likely to choose the healthy options at school. Ultimately, the parent is the one in charge of the child.

Wake up. Stop blaming the food manufacturer. Stop suing the fast food restaurant. Stop pointing the finger at the school cafeteria. Stop wondering why this country is obese.

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■ Editorial

The Bush philosophy: Buy now, pay later

President Bush has said his administration "will do what it takes" to pay for damage caused by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

So far, it appears he will do whatever it takes as long as it doesn't involve raising taxes or cutting military spending. The day after his Sept. 15 speech in response to Katrina, he ruled out increasing taxes and said costs could be handled by cutting "unnecessary spending."

It turns out that at least part of that "unnecessary spending" will come out of social programs like Medicaid. Congress is working to determine how it can cut those programs by more than \$35 billion over five years — a great idea with hundreds of thousands of citizens in financial ruin.

Obviously, these cuts will not pay for reconstruction of the Gulf States, which is projected to cost as much as \$150 billion. So how is Bush planning to pay for the necessary repair? Easy: He'll borrow it.

He has borrowed from central banks in China and Japan to pay for the war and cut taxes simultaneously. In fact, 46 percent of the national debt (about \$2.1 trillion) is owed to foreign nations.

Moreover, taxpayers will shell out roughly \$208 billion this fiscal year to cover interest on this debt at an average annual interest rate of about 4.5 percent, assuming a simple fixed rate.

At those rates, a loan of \$150 billion to cover reconstruction would cost about \$6.75 billion per year, or \$34 billion over the next five years.

So the \$35 billion of "unnecessary spending" on social programs will barely pay the interest. Add that to the interest the United States racked up this year, without Katrina, and the billions it'll pay next year, and it equals a big mess for the next person to clean up.

There's also the fact, as reported by The Washington Post, that nearly \$300 billion in emergency spending on the war in Iraq has "never been offset by cuts in other areas or tax increases."

This may appear to be surprising behavior coming from a "conservative" administration, but a quick look at Bush's fiscal history shows that it's par for the course.

Bush has never vetoed a spending bill. He passed the biggest highway bill ever, even though the \$286 billion total was \$36 billion higher than what he said he would accept. The prescription drug plan he passed will cost about \$700 billion over 10 years. Congress also deserves a share of the blame. Although Republicans have traditionally aimed to reduce the government's size, Congress has allowed discretionary spending to rise more under Bush than under Lyndon B. Johnson, according to the conservative American Enterprise Institute's Veronique de Rugy.

New York Times columnist David Brooks aptly described the spending crisis on a Sept. 23 episode of PBS' "The NewsHour": "So instead of having a governing philosophy that will tell them, 'I'm going to spend it here but not there,' [Republicans] have a governing philosophy that is irrelevant to actually governing." Brooks said, "So they take that anti-governing philosophy and they just toss it out the window and when they get here they just spend like sailors."

Now is the time to resuscitate the small-government ideal. Making responsible cuts will be difficult, but the Gulf States need to be reconstructed without driving up debt or cutting social programs that will benefit hurricane victims. Congress' proposals for cuts are unacceptable.

Bottom line: Bush needs to stop borrowing money. He needs to find some brainpower (preferably someone else's), look to old Republican ideals and find a solution that won't dig this country into a hole it can't get out of.

Jonathan C. Evans
Law Student

INBOX

Senators must protect endangered species

As fall arrives, American bald eagles will return to the Willamette Valley in greater numbers than previous years. It is not just the season that is bringing our national bird back; The Endangered Species Act (ESA) — the most important law fostering the return of the bald eagle and other animals — has greatly affected the bald eagle population.

To date, the ESA has helped species large and small. From the gray whale and grizzly bear in the oceans and forests to the Willamette daisy and Fender's blue butterfly in our own backyards, the ESA has helped keep these species around for us to enjoy.

A recent scientific study in the journal *BioScience* found that species protected under the ESA are more likely to increase in numbers. The study also found that species living for two or more years in land designated a "critical habitat" appeared more likely to improve in status.

Now, more than ever, we need the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Species are going extinct at a rate we haven't seen since the last ice age, yet some members of Congress feel the need to undermine this hugely successful law for a narrow group of

property-rights activists.

Representative Richard Pombo, R-Calif., supported by Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., introduced and passed a bill sure to tear holes in the safety net provided by the Endangered Species Act if it passes through the Senate and becomes a law. Under the guise of increasing the populations of threatened or endangered species, the bill is in fact a thinly-veiled attempt to satisfy special interests. According to a recent poll conducted by the University of Arizona, 84 percent of Americans support current or stronger endangered species protections. Unfortunately, Congress is not listening to the majority. The logging, mining, cattle and oil industries, which have lobbyists in Washington, D.C., have influenced legislators to destroy the ESA.

House bill 3824 has been dubbed the Wildlife Extinction Bill and has been attacked from both sides of the political spectrum. The Wildlife Extinction Bill is bad news for threatened species, taxpayers and science.

The bill forces us to choose between rampant habitat destruction and big payoffs to developers. Pombo's bill would force wildlife agencies to choose between abandoning enforcement of the ESA or writing large checks to pay developers to comply

with the law.

This bill eliminates scientific review. It forces wildlife agencies to accept the developer's characterization of a project's impacts. It denies scientists the ability to request additional information from the developer.

The Wildlife Extinction Bill politicizes scientific decisions. The only thing worse than money in politics is politics in science. The Endangered Species Act requires that all decisions be made on basis of the best-available scientific information — what constitutes the best science is left up to the scientific community. Pombo's bill allows the secretary of the interior to define what science is sound.

Finally, the Wildlife Extinction Bill weakens recovery efforts. The ESA requires that recovery plans be implemented and that species be protected until they are fully recovered. Pombo's bill allows agencies to ignore recovery plans, and it requires protections to be removed within individual states even though the species, as a whole, is tumbling toward extinction.

Fortunately the bill isn't law yet; it must still pass in the Senate. It's time to ask our senators to stand up for endangered species.

Jonathan C. Evans
Law Student