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OPINION

Rallying Help for Young Males of Color

The president's inspiring announcement

BY MARC H. MORIAL

I was on hand at the White House last month for one of the most inspiring and important Presidential announcements in recent history.



In the aftermath of the killings of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, and in response to data showing how badly the odds are stacked against millions of boys and young men of color in the United States, President Obama kicked-off "My Brother's Keeper," an unprecedented public-private initiative aimed at improving life outcomes and addressing opportunity gaps for the

nation's most vulnerable population.

The President made the announcement before an audience of young males of color and a coalition of government, business, civic and philanthropic leaders. I was proud to be there to represent the National Urban League.

In unusually personal terms, President Obama spoke about his own struggles with drugs and alienation as a young boy growing up without a father. He called on all Americans to do more to improve the prospects for young males of color who are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be unemployed or end up in jail than any other group in America.

Framing the initiative as both a moral and economic impera-

tive, President Obama has done what Congress has failed to do over the past five years, convene a diverse and bipartisan coalition of Americans committed to targeted help for communities and populations most in need.

At the heart of the My Brother's Keeper initiative is a commitment from a group of businesses and large and small foundations who have pledged at least \$200 million over the next five years, on top of the \$150 million they have already invested to test and expand proven strategies for improving the life prospects of young males of color. The President has also formed an interagency federal task force to direct this effort.

As the National Urban League Movement has asserted for years, we know what works:

early childhood education, stronger pathways to college and the world of work, alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline policies, shutting down the school-to-prison pipeline, more guidance from fathers and mentors, and the courage and determination of young males of color themselves to reject negative stereotypes, make good choices and succeed.

The need for this initiative is clear. Data shows that boys and young men of color, regardless of socio-economic background, are disproportionately at risk throughout the journey from their youngest years to college and career, including large disparities in reading proficiency, employment, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

These young men are more than six times more likely to be

victims of murder than their white peers and account for almost half of the country's murder victims each year. As the President said, "These statistics should break our hearts, and they should compel us to act." I agree and I commend President Obama for his leadership in tackling this problem.

"My Brother's Keeper" is an inspiring example of what we can do when we transform words into action and coalesce around complex issues with a commitment to changing lives. But, there is still much to be done as we work together, across the public-private-non-profit spectrum, to drive this initiative forward. The opportunity is before us, and so is the will.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

A Sweet Victory for Nutrition Labels

Finally, the government sides with consumers

BY JILL RICHARDSON

The Food and Drug Administration re-

cently came out with a sweet surprise. Its proposed new nutrition label will finally give us a bit of key information we need to understand our food: the amount of added sugars.

If you look at a nutrition label now, you will see how many grams of sugar are in a serving of your food. That includes all sugars. It counts the lactose in milk and naturally occurring sugars from fruit. The nutritionally important bit of info for most of us is not total sugars, but added sugars — which include the sweetener we call "sugar" plus others like high-fructose corn syrup and honey.

In addition to the blueberries and the yogurt in your blueberry yogurt, how much sugar did the manufacturer add? If you're trying to pick the healthiest yogurt

or granola bar, that's a fact you need to know.

OK, so every breakfast cereal in the aisle has some sugar added to it, but do the 19 grams of sugar in Kellogg's Raisin Bran come from the raisins or from sugar and high-fructose corn syrup? How does it stack up against



In truth, added sugar's more than just an empty calorie. It's harmful to your body in a number of ways, and eating too much can increase your risk of contracting diabetes and heart disease, having a stroke, and more serious illnesses.

Froot Loops, which only has 12 grams of sugar but no fruit at all?

Until now, the simplest way to do this was something nobody will try at home. You can count the number of raisins per serving of Raisin Bran and then calculate the amount of sugar in them. And, as it turns out, the cereal is actually full of added sugars.

More than two decades ago, the nutrition activist group Cen-

ter for Science in the Public Interest asked the government to include "Added Sugars" on nutrition labels. The government refused. Why? Because it might confuse consumers.

The activist group tried again in 1999. That year, sugar consumption hit an all-time high. Yet again, the answer was no.

In 2013, with First Lady Michelle Obama calling the nation's attention to the catastrophic state of our diets, it was time to try again. And — just recently — the Food and Drug Administration agreed.

It's ridiculous that it took two decades for the government to side with consumers over the interests of the food industry, but thank goodness our leaders came to their senses. At least on this

one issue.

The nutrition advice you've probably heard on sugar involves phrases like "empty calories" and "eat sparingly." The conventional wisdom was that added sugars were bad simply because they contributed calories to your diet without any nutrition.

As for the advice about eating it "sparingly," that's not what we do here in the United States, where about 15 percent of our calories come from sugar.

In truth, added sugar's more than just an empty calorie. It's harmful to your body in a number of ways, and eating too much can increase your risk of contracting diabetes and heart disease, having a stroke, and

more serious illnesses.

The good news is, once the new nutrition labels take effect, you'll at least be able to know how much you're eating. Going by the American Heart Association's recommendations, women should stick to six teaspoons (25 grams) or less, and men to nine teaspoons (38 grams) or less.

Hopefully, food companies will be as eager to claim their products are low in added sugars as they were to claim "zero trans fats" when that went on the label.

Successfully reducing sugar consumption to healthier levels, even with labeling, will be no picnic in the toxic food environment we live in. The real change will come if — or when — food companies decide to remove heaps of the sweet stuff from our food instead of admitting to obscene amounts of it on their labels.

And that will be a sweet victory for health.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.