

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

No Appetite for Fixing School Lunch

Nothing will improve without an investment

BY JILL RICHARDSON

You can lead a kid to vegetables, but you can't make her eat. Especially if the food doesn't taste good.



That's what the government found out in the wake of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

I was active in advocating for school lunch reform at the time. The bill became law shortly after I published a book on U.S. food policy. It seemed like such a perfect solution: Fix school lunch and you improve the diets of millions of kids instantly. You also help the next generation develop healthy habits for life.

Kids who eat breakfast and lunch at school eat nearly half their week's meals in the cafeteria. Kids who just eat school lunch consume nearly one quarter of their meals at school. Swap-

ping out French fries for sautéed kale and sugary foods for fresh fruit would go a long way to improve our nation's diets and health.

If only the kids would eat them, that is.

Here's the thing. Back when the law was debated, school lunch and nutrition experts agreed on a number of things that schools needed, like tougher nutrition standards—but nothing will improve if Congress doesn't give schools more money. As best as I could tell, it would take about an extra 50 cents to a dollar per meal to really get school lunch where it ought to be. Instead, Congress gave schools a mere six cents more.

Cooking real food—the healthy kind—takes more than just fresh ingredients, which already often costs more than frozen or canned junk. It requires a knowledgeable school lunch staff that can prepare the food. It requires refrigerators, cutting boards, and knives.

Junk food, on the other hand, requires freezers, microwaves, and very few skills to heat and serve.

Another sticky point: Making healthy

food taste good for cheap is not easy. As Michael Moss pointed out in his book *Salt Sugar Fat*, Campbell's soup could drastically reduce the sodium in its soups if it replaced it with fresh herbs like rosemary. But rosemary is expensive, salt is cheap, and if you simply cut the salt without adding herbs to the soup, it tastes terrible.

Switching up kids' food also requires outreach. Kids can resist trying new foods, but—with some effort by caring grown-ups—they can even enjoy healthy foods.

Take the time I had fifth-grade Girl Scouts over to learn about children's lives in Kenya. The girls took a pretend trip to Kenya in which they planted seeds, harvested kale, and cooked the Kenyan corn dish, ugali, which is similar to polenta.

I expected full-scale rebellion when the girls ate their meal of beans, kale, and corn. Instead, they fought over the kale and begged for more. They didn't just earn a badge for their vests, they discovered that beans and green veggies can taste good.

Without increasing the \$11 billion fed-

eral budget for school lunches, you get in the pickle we're in now. Schools can't afford to meet tighter nutrition standards, and kids are throwing out the increased fruits, veggies, and whole grains schools now serve instead of eating them. This shouldn't be a surprise.

And yet, the political debate doesn't revolve around giving schools the increased funding they need to make healthier lunches work. Instead, Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL) proposed giving struggling schools a break from the tighter nutrition standards for the next school year.

Washington treats school lunch spending as an expenditure. It's actually an investment.

Increased spending on better lunches could create new jobs for lunch staff while improving the health of America's youth—and that would continue to pay us back for decades to come as today's kids grow up with healthier habits.

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*.

African Leaders Summit: The Ties that Bind

Forging stronger partnerships

BY MARC H. MORIAL

"I stand before you as the president of the United States and a proud American. I also stand before you as the son of a man from Africa. The blood of Africa runs through our family. And so for us, the bonds between our countries, our continents, are deeply personal." — President Barack Obama



At a time when much of the world seems to be tearing apart in places like Iraq, Israel, Gaza, Syria and Ukraine, President Obama this month hosted leaders from 50 African nations at the White House for a three-day summit, described by the Administration as reflecting "the common ambition that the people and government of the United States share with the people and governments of Africa to leave our nations better for future generations by making concrete gains in peace and security, good governance and economic development."

Themed, "Investment in the Next Generation," the summit was the largest gathering

of African heads of state in our nation's history.

The President acknowledged the personal aspect of the meeting by referencing his father, Barack Obama Sr., who was born in Kenya, as well as the painful legacy of the African slave trade. But the primary focus of the meeting was on strengthening economic ties between the United States and Africa in ways that spur African development and create tens of thousands of American jobs.

President Obama used the summit to announce a shift in America's relationship with what he called "the new Africa."

Where once United States involvement centered on providing humanitarian aid to Africa, it will now concentrate on expanding trade and investments that benefit both America and the African continent. While challenges of health, security and governance remain, the fact is that Africa has six of the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world. Its population is expected to double by 2050, when two-thirds will be young people under the age of 35.

Deputy National Security Advisor, Ben Rhodes explained, "Insofar as we can promote trade and investment, that is going to create new markets for our goods... and ultimately create jobs in both the United States and Africa. So this is about

seizing the opportunity of African growth and development in our mutual interests."

In his post-summit press conference, the President announced that the gathering had generated some \$37 billion for Africa's progress on top of substantial efforts that have been made in the past.

This includes \$33 billion by U.S. companies in new trade and investment; a U.S. government investment of \$110 million per year for three to five years to help build the peace-keeping capacity of more than a half-dozen African nations to deal with militant extremists like Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia; a tripling of the United States' Power Africa Initiative goal, which now aims to bring electricity to 60 million African homes and businesses; and an increase in efforts by both the Obama Administration and American non-governmental organizations to combat HIV and AIDs and improve ma-

ternal and child health.

The President made it clear that "Africa's prosperity ultimately depends on its greatest resource — its people." None of the investments and trade agreements will matter unless African countries do more to promote good governance, the rule of law, open and accountable institutions, strong civil societies and the protection of human rights for all citizens.

Africa, America and President Obama are inextricably bound by the ties of blood and history. We applaud the President's commitment to bind our futures with stronger partnerships in economic development and in meeting the health and security challenges that affect America, Africa and the world.

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

Subscribe! Fill Out & Send To: **The Portland Observer**
 Attn: Subscriptions, PO Box 3137, Portland OR 97208
503-288-0033

\$45.00 for 3 months • \$80.00 for 6 mo. • \$125.00 for 1 year (include check)

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

or email subscriptions@portlandobserver.com