

**YES** Removing unhealthy high-calorie snacks and drinks from schools is an important step toward tackling the nation's childhood obesity epidemic.

About a third of American children are overweight or obese. Addressing that problem requires changing what kids eat in school, where many kids consume half of their daily calories.

Reforming our school meals program will ensure that all foods served in schools are healthy and nutritious. By setting standards for the food that is served and sold in cafeterias, we can make sure our children have the opportunity for a healthy start in life.

The sale of unhealthy high-calorie snacks and drinks in school vending machines undermines these efforts to ensure access to healthy and nutritious food in schools. But it doesn't mean the end of vending machines in schools; it means stocking them with more nutritious offerings to make healthy choices available to students.

Why is this something the government needs to get involved in? Because the potential impact is enormous. Children who are obese can face lifelong struggles with their weight: 80 percent of teenagers who are obese remain obese as adults. That increases their risk of suffering from certain cancers and chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and high blood pressure.

Rebuilding and revitalizing America requires the next generation to be the healthiest and best educated in our history. We won't succeed if our school environments and our students aren't healthy. If we fail to act, today's children may be the first generation to have shorter life expectancies than their parents. ●

—TOM VILSACK

U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

**NO** It's not the government's job to make decisions about what we eat and where we eat it. That's why it's a bad idea to ban soda and candy from schools.

The problem with government intervention in this area is that it erodes personal responsibility rather than encouraging it.

When the government gets involved in forcing kids to change their diet—in this case by banning soda and candy in schools—it undermines students' ability to learn how to make healthy decisions for themselves.

As anyone who has tried to lose weight is likely to tell you, going "cold turkey" and avoiding tempting foods is setting yourself up for failure, and that's exactly what banning particular foods will do. Researchers call this the "forbidden fruit theory," because we often crave things we're not allowed to have.

So then why is there so much talk about banning soda and candy from schools? Because when faced with a

problem as complicated as our nation's childhood obesity epidemic, it's easier to simply assign blame to sugary drinks and snacks, rather than tackling the various roots of the problem.

It is true that soda and candy are high in calories, but in fact, there isn't any evidence that either directly causes obesity. Why then should soda and candy be singled out from the hundreds of high-calorie and high-fat foods, and banned from schools?

Instead of banning particular foods and drinks, schools should focus on teaching students to lead active, healthy lives—offering classes on healthy cooking, or gym classes that make it fun to be active. Removing unhealthy choices is no way to teach students how to make healthy ones. ●

—J. JUSTIN WILSON

CENTER FOR CONSUMER FREEDOM



## SHOULD CANDY AND SODA BE BANNED FROM SCHOOLS?

President Obama has proposed removing high-calorie drinks and snacks from school vending machines