



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 6, 2010

House Passes School Nutrition Bill That Is No Treat

Remember that clause in the Constitution that gives the federal government the authority to regulate school bake sales? Even if you don't, Congress does. The House of Representatives just passed a \$4.5 billion bill that, among other things, authorizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture to set nutrition guidelines for all foods sold in a school building during school hours — and that includes “bake sales and pizza fundraisers,” according to [CalorieLab.com](#). (If pressed, elected officials would undoubtedly note that such sales can affect interstate commerce since students buying cupcakes at school would no longer be buying them from Hostess, thus providing an opening for Congress to regulate these activities.)



On December 2 the House voted 264 to 157 to pass the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a bill that had been approved unanimously by the Senate in August and that President Barack Obama has indicated he will sign. He'd better: His wife, Michelle, has been pushing the bill hard as part of her anti-childhood obesity campaign.

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In addition to giving the USDA the power to determine the nutritive content of foods sold in schools, the bill also increases child-nutrition program funding, increases the federal reimbursement rate for subsidized meals, expands access to school lunch programs by automatically qualifying children on Medicaid (about 120,000 more kids, [according to the Christian Science Monitor](#)), and expands after-school meal programs.

The bill is being touted as a solution to both hunger and obesity, which would seem to call for opposing fixes. Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), however, explained: “Hunger and obesity are two sides of the same coin. Highly processed, empty-calorie foods are less expensive than fresh nutritious foods.” McGovern did not address the possibility that federal subsidies for certain crops, such as corn, might be part of the reason for the cost disparity.

Besides, the evidence that controlling what kids eat at school and otherwise hectoring them about good nutrition will have a measurable effect on their weight and overall health is scant indeed, as Harriet Brown wrote in [a 2006 New York Times article](#):

Like other misguided public health campaigns..., putting children on de facto diets at school just doesn't work. In a 2003 experiment involving 41 schools, more than 1,700 children — many of them American Indian — were served lower-calorie and lower-fat lunches and were taught about healthy eating and lifestyles.



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While the children took in fewer calories from fat at school, they experienced no significant reduction in their percentage of body fat.

Another study, in rural Nebraska in the mid-1990s, put one group of elementary school students on lower-fat and lower-sodium lunches, increased their physical activity at school and offered more education about nutrition. Compared with students having no special program, the active, lower-fat group showed no differences in body weight or fat, or in levels of total cholesterol, insulin or glucose after two years.

Researchers concluded that pupils whose school lunches offered 25 percent fat (compared with 31 percent in the control group) were compensating for the reduction by eating higher-fat foods at home.

Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.), a physician, hit the nail on the head when he said: “This bill is not about child nutrition. It’s not about healthy kids. It’s about an expansion of the federal government, more and more control from Washington, borrowing more money and putting our children in greater debt. The federal government has no business setting nutritional standards and telling families what they should and should not eat.”

If anything, the bill is about bringing up a generation of kids who have received their food, medical care, and education from Uncle Sam, to whom they can be expected to remain loyal subjects. That, more than the alleged attempt to combat hunger and obesity, probably explains why so many Democrats and the left-wing Center for Science in the Public Interest are enthusiastic about the legislation.

It is also about money for unionized school cafeteria workers. The Service Employees International Union, which represents many food-service workers employed in schools, lobbied heavily for the bill. Last January SEIU Executive Vice President Mitch Ackerman gave away the real reason for the union’s support for the legislation, [saying](#), “A more robust expansion of school lunch, breakfast, summer feeding, child care and WIC is critical to reducing hunger, ending childhood obesity, and *providing fair wages and healthcare for front line food service workers.*” (Emphasis added.) That same press release noted that “cafeteria workers hoping to improve their wages” would be “lobbying in-district and in Washington for a robust reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.”

Let it also be noted that the same politicians who voted for this bill supposedly to alleviate hunger chose to fund its outlays by cutting future allocations for food stamps with a promise from President Obama to restore the cuts in later legislation. Let it further be noted that this is at least the second time this year that Democrats, members of the party that claims a monopoly on compassion for the poor, have voted to cut food stamps in order to benefit their political allies. In August Congress passed and Obama signed a bill to [spend \\$26 billion](#) on teachers, cops, and other government employees, also reducing food-stamp benefits to cover the cost but promising to undo the cuts in the future.

There is, indeed, no such thing as a free lunch. A people that expects to be given bread and circuses from their government without being controlled by that same government expects what never has been and never will be. After all, slaves in the antebellum South got free meals, too.



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