



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 9, 2012

Obesity Is National Security Problem

The federal government has been progressively moving toward pronouncing obesity as a threat to the security of our nation. The First Lady has been the principal advocate of this. In December, 2010, [she](#) said in prepared remarks: "Military leaders tell us that when more than one in four young people are unqualified for military service because of their weight, childhood obesity isn't just a public health threat, it's not just an economic threat, it's a national security threat as well."



The next month, in January 2011, retired Major General Paul Monroe on CNN Radio said: "The military found that one in four recruits are not eligible because of weight," he said. "And not everyone wants to be in the military, and when you reduce it by 25 percent, it's a real problem."

This has been a bipartisan effort. In November 2011, Bill Frist, a heart surgeon who was the Senate Majority Leader when Republicans ran that chamber, cited a 2010 study called "Too Fat To Fight," when he said:

Childhood obesity is something much larger than something that just hurts and pulls back and restrains our economic strength. It threatens our security, our national security as a nation. Between 1995 and 2008, over 140,000 potential military recruits failed their entrance physicals, failed them because they were too heavy. That's 140,000 young men and women who were motivated enough to enlist but, because of being overweight, could not. They were the ones who wanted to serve their country, who were willing to put themselves in harm's way, and they were told, "No, you're too heavy to safely be trained."

We hear the quotations all the time from people who are right on the front line. Retired four star U.S. Army General Johnny Wilson said that childhood obesity, and I quote, "has become so serious in this country that military leaders are viewing this epidemic as a potential threat to our national security," end quotation.

Then in February of this year, the Pentagon said that it considered obesity a national security issue because it was harder to find fit recruits. The Department of Defense announced that, for the first time in two decades, it was changing the diet of the military. The new plan is intended to have more fruits, vegetables, and grains. This would not only affect meals served at 1,100 dining facilities, but also vending machines.

On May 7, 2012, White House chef Sam Kass, who is also the healthy-eating policy advisor to Michelle Obama and the White House, got into the act, stating to a group of healthcare officials that obesity threatens our national security:

What motivates us is not just the fact that one in three Americans will have diabetes in their lifetime if we don't change course, but the impact that it is having on our economy, on our health care system or our kids' ability to learn, It's not just the fact that obesity may be our nation's



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greatest national security threat, although all those reasons are of vital importance.... This is our life's work. The first lady dedicated her time and passion at the White House because this issue meant most to her as a mother and as an American.

But the arguments are mainly specious fearmongering. First, the claims are based on the notion that all the rejected applicants are beyond help. They are not fit to be soldiers — so to speak. But the Army could do what it has considered doing in the past: offering a “fat camp” to overweight applicants to get them in shape for boot camp. The Army already offers courses so that prospective soldiers can get their GEDs and enlist. (Maybe everyone should be required to go to school to solve this problem because a lack of learning is a “national security concern” — oh wait, Americans are already required to attend school.) The Army also offers two-week camps to people who are already in the Army and become fat after enlistment — it's called Operation Fit Warrior.

The fears also assume that more Americans will become obese in the future and not be available to enlist and that the pool of military candidates cannot be improved through some other method, such as better pay and less chance of dying or being maimed in wars that seem to have little to do with our national security.

Unless the wash-out standards for the armed forces are watered down — and that is not being suggested by anyone — then national defense is not being adversely affected by the paunchiness of most Americans.

Too, these arguments seem to suggest a federal right to meddle in the most basic of human decisions: what to eat and, perhaps, when to exercise. The choice of what to eat is very near to those basic civic rights described by the Founding Fathers when they defined the purposes of government as protecting our individual rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” People have known for many hundreds of years that diet is connected with health and that a combination of eating too much and exercising too little leads to health problems. But even the most cursory perusal of people who live past 100 includes men and women who smoke, drink, and live as they choose. Indeed, individual autonomy seems to be an excellent predictor of long term health.

If health gurus are looking for a method to promote healthy lifestyles, they might be better served encouraging their countrymen to be much more religious. Orthodox Jews, Catholic nuns and priests, and devout Christians of all denominations naturally eschew as sins things such as drunkenness, gluttony, and sloth. Those Americans who take their Christian or Jewish faith most seriously have a very significant advantage, as the Gallup Poll showed in a 2010 study, which found that the “very religious” were more likely to exercise regularly, eat much fruits and vegetables, and abstain from smoking. The “moderately religious” scored lower in every category than the “very religious” but better in every category than the “nonreligious.”

When Gallup expanded its study in 2011 to include not only “Physical Health Index,” but “Life Evaluation Index,” “Emotional Health Index,” “Healthy Behaviors Index” and “Work Environment Index,” the very religious scored significantly better than both the moderately religious and the nonreligious except in the “Physical Health Index,” in which the very religious scored 77.5 and the nonreligious scored 78.1 and the very religious scored better than the moderately religious in virtually every area of the survey.

Perhaps instead of lecturing Americans about how to live, our “leaders” — the First Lady, the former Senate Majority Leader, and the military officers — should be entreating their countrymen to read the



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Bible, pray daily, and go to church or synagogue every week. This divinely inspired system of healthy living works remarkably well and it has for thousands of years. Perhaps, though, we should not hold our breath waiting for statist collectivists to turn our attention away from them and toward God.



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