



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 4, 2010

San Francisco Ponders Regulation of Happy Meals

San Francisco is considering a new city ordinance that would prohibit McDonald's from putting a toy in its Happy Meal boxes unless it also included fruit and vegetables and reduced the calories of the Happy Meal. This proposal is just one of several recent efforts by San Francisco to restrict the freedom of its citizens so that they are healthier. The city has banned the sale of sweetened soda drinks from vending machines on city property and banned the sale of tobacco from groceries.



If the ordinance is passed, it is hard to see what real impact it will have on the health of children. Parents might simply order an adult meal for their children — especially if the Happy Meal did not have a toy — and so increase the actual calories of the meal. Most national fast food chains have some variation of the famous Happy Meal, and customers could easily be diverted to other fast food chains whose children's meals were not regulated. The ordinance would also, almost inevitably, lead to micromanagement of what sort of fruit and vegetables were permissible in the Happy Meal.

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San Francisco politicians appear to ignore the economic consequences of their actions. Businesses that perceive this level of overregulation in San Francisco will probably think twice before increasing outlets or expanding investments in that city. Reductions in the sale of Happy Meals — and, because when Happy Meals are sold parents and other family members also buy McDonald's meals — will cost the city of San Francisco sales tax revenue if McDonald's patrons choose to eat either outside the city or at home instead of eating out. Reductions in sales will also lead to fewer working hours for McDonald's employees and fewer of the city's poorer citizens being able to work at McDonald's.

These politicians also seem to have no concept of free market competition and its power to solve problems. Childhood obesity is a serious national problem. Parents, who are much more interested in the welfare of their children than municipal bureaucrats, consider the welfare of their children when making decisions in the marketplace. McDonald's, like every other major fast food chain, is very aware of the interest of parents in improving their children's health. Chains like McDonald's receive only a tiny profit on a single family sale. These companies rely upon corporate goodwill, and so McDonald's



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knows the commercial value of persuading parents that the Happy Meal is a safe, healthy, and wise choice for their children.

Not only is McDonald's aware of the value of goodwill with fast-food customers, but so are its competitors. Both Burger King and Wendy's strive to present a more appealing and healthy product for parents to buy than McDonald's offers. Supermarkets and food manufacturers also work to create products that are healthier for children. San Francisco politicians — seemingly believing that simply because government has not regulated an area of private life, therefore no incentives exist for retailers of goods and services to the public — do not strive to improve the health, safety, and wellbeing of their customers.

Parents, signally, are left out as well. The food a child eats is primarily what his parents buy at the grocery. These foods are not adult- or child-specific. If parents bring home sweetened soda, then unless they control their children, the children will likely drink that soda. If the parents buy junk food, their children will eat that junk food. The very idea that government is, somehow, insuring the health of children actually dilutes the role of parents by creating the illusion that city ordinances are safeguarding children from health problems.

Ironically, San Francisco has a high rate of HIV and other infectious diseases caused by promiscuous homosexual behavior, something that does not seem to trouble City Hall at all. Forty years ago, the city was a haven for adolescents who wanted to use illegal and dangerous drugs. Today San Francisco is a "Haven City" for illegal immigrants and a coddler of violent criminals, both of which groups also endanger public safety. Thus, it's difficult to see the real seriousness of the proposed micromanagement of McDonald's menu offerings. Parents and small children, it seems, are the only people in the city who cannot be trusted to make intelligent health and safety choices on their own.



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