

WAR ON OBESITY & NOW'S OTHER ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

The “Bold Theme” that fat people are dooming America (or even the world!) is taken as gospel, rather than an unattractive marginalizing trend, or what some sociologists call a “moral panic.” However you feel about the “War on Obesity,” some day we will understand that our unquestioning assumptions about the current state of “obesity science” have had a huge impact on public policy.

The “War on Obesity” – and the odd level of hysteria over fat people – currently impacts many public policy issues: insurance coverage issues, school policies tax & funding ideas. Likely discrimination issues include: stereotyped healthcare for fat children & adults; child custody discrimination – parents blamed for fat kids, as well as questioning the fitness of fat people to be parents; and work issues include hiring, promotion, and “front office job” discrimination based on looks rather than abilities.

Some policies, such as increasing activity for all students (& workers), and better nutritional choices in schools, are great. But, the “war” isn’t on sedentary behavior or junk food or even ill health. Its very name singles out for stereotyping and discrimination, fat people. Rewards don’t come to those, fat or thin, who eat nutritionally & exercise wisely. School nurses aren’t required to send home notes about thin kids eating junk food or slacking off in gym class. The “war” is a blatant thin-supremacy movement subsidized by our government, and profiting the multi-billion dollar diet industries – including the drug and “healthcare” industries.

Without going into detail, it’s good to be aware that, in 2007, we live in a social climate very punishing to fat people, which has imposed on them numerous stereotypes and unrealistic expectations.

CHANGE HOW YOU SEE, NOT HOW YOU LOOK.

Voices refusing to chant the thin-supremacy mantra are ignored in the circles of power. Is it hypocrisy to suggest thin people can be gluttonous or lazy or that fat people can be industrious and healthy? Yet who benefits from the thin supremacy stereotypes? Who profits most from degrading fat people? Who is being tricked? Are we paying enough attention to drug companies’ profit-driven “research;” or thin supremacy ads aimed at our kids? What about the fraudulent diet products that boggle the imagination or bypass surgery for kids and adults? Who profits most?

A WAIST IS A TERRIBLE THING TO MIND

NOW believes that policies assuming the stereotypes will have flaws. The stereotypes go something like this:

Thin = good health/good citizen, good habits/exerciser/good nutrition, modest portions/smart, educated/classiness/deserving...

Fat = doomed health/ bad citizen, not trying hard enough/lazy/bad food choices, gluttonous/stupid, uninformed/low class/undeserving... (Ouch!) Save me from the people trying to save me!

Not to mention, “reputable sources” buy into the myth that if it weren’t for fat people the (profit-based) healthcare “system” would be just fine. And if you believe that I’ve got a 9th Ward in New Orleans to sell ya.

Beware the stereotypes!

FAT, FOOD & PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES

Tracking the 123rd Legislature

In the 123rd I don't see much so far. A lot of issues more on point were at least partly addressed in the 122nd.

LD184 (Sen. Turner, Co-Sponsors: Sen. Marrache, Reps. Cain, Faircloth, Lansley, Pingree, Strang Burgess) This bill prohibits brand-specific food or beverage advertising on school grounds, except for water and product packaging, and prohibits the use of tobacco on school grounds by members of the public. This bill also extends the prohibition on most tobacco use on school grounds by employees and students when school is not in session.

NOW – This bill looks good. Schools should be an ad & tobacco free zone!

LD185 (Rep. Annis) This bill prohibits persons selling, offering for sale or serving in any retail store, hotel, restaurant or other public eating place any food or food product, from directly adding monosodium glutamate (MSG) to the food being sold or served. It also makes the labeling requirements apply to food that already contains MSG and deletes references to adding MSG in crystal form.

NOW – It is not clear to me why MSG should be singled out in law. Like salt it adds sodium & is meant to enhance flavor. Some 3000 chemicals are used as food additives. MSG is one of 9 associated with occasional adverse reactions in some people. But, there are a lot worse [a LOT worse!] things in our food supply.

EXERCISE

LD292 (Rep. Fischer) The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$500,000, will be used to help construct a recreation center for the City of Presque Isle through its Department of Parks and Recreation.

NOW – In general, NOW supports efforts to increase recreation. I am unfamiliar with any specifics on this project, but in an era when the global economy is exacerbating the “Two Maines,” R&D affirmative action R&D for The County is a plus.

LD432 (Sen. Damon) The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$10,000,000, will be used to improve, maintain and develop a trails network in Maine.

NOW – In general, NOW supports efforts to increase recreation. I am unfamiliar with any specifics on this project.

TAXES ON “SNACKS,” TOBACCO, & ALCOHOL

Proposals to raise money by increasing taxes on products associated with unhealthy behavior are being discussed.

NOW – Most people think the “Snack Tax” could be more trouble than it is worth. I tend to agree. [Dark chocolate – snack or health food?] Maine has had such a tax before, so many people are already opposed.

Increasing taxes on tobacco is more a matter of how much. The Governor asked for a \$1 increase on cigarettes, and is likely to get some increase. In general, incentives for healthy behavior work better than disincentives for unhealthy behavior. Yet, it seems a good idea to throw up monetary roadblocks on tobacco and alcohol.

LD31 (Rep. Weddell) Proposes to increase the tax on cigarettes and alcohol and use the revenue from the tax increase to fund programs aimed at prevention and treatment of addictions to tobacco and alcohol.

NOW – Directed revenue can be a good idea. And we could certainly use more funding in these areas.

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