

Michelle Obama's War on Childhood Obesity

Aleighta Page Staff Writer

First Lady Michelle Obama recently announced her plans for an effort to end childhood obesity. Her program for healthier eating habits of American children is coined "healthy eating, healthy families," and it will focus on showing American families the value of a nutritious and balanced diet and teaching them how to jumpstart a healthy lifestyle in the home. The First Lady notes in a January 20, 2010 USA Today article by Nanci Hellmich that "this has nothing to do with whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, liberal or conservative. It's about the future we want for our kids."

Childhood obesity has been a growing epidemic for approximately a decade. With food portion sizes ballooning, outdoor play decreasing, and junk food commercials everywhere, this is not surprising. But obesity brings a slew of health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, and high cholesterol in addition to many psychological ailments. People who are overweight are more vulnerable to having high levels of anxiety and depression. This is especially unhealthy for children, who rely on interaction with their peers for development. The teasing of other children can be so damaging that the low self esteem follows a person for years, even if they do manage to lose the weight. But regardless of all these factors, the rate of childhood obesity is

growing, not decreasing, across the nation, and this is an issue the First Lady hopes to address.

On January 20, 2010, the First Lady spoke to a group of mayors concerning the issue of obesity in their communities. Mrs. Obama attributes the gains in obesity to a variety of sources. One of those sources is that there are busy parents who do not have the time make a nutritious meal. In an October 13, 2009 CBS News article by Amanda Sterling Mrs. Obama admits to "coming after a long day to hungry children who want something fast like pizza" and giving it to them because it was easy—illustrating that she obviously understands the plights of parents across the nation. In fact her inspiration for the campaign came from her parenting. The First Lady was inspired to jumpstart this campaign in part because she noticed her oldest daughter, Malia, began to put on a few extra pounds after the onset of an early puberty. Her daughter's pediatrician noted that the young girl was overweight for her age bracket, and for the First Lady, this was an alarming wake up call. It



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was even more alarming when Mrs. Obama discovered that one third (1/3) of children are overweight, and these factors led her to choose to make a public campaign to battle childhood obesity.

Foremost, the First Lady wants to implement changes in the way children eat and view food. The January 20, 2010 USA Today article by Nancy Hellmich explains that her plan is "to put in place common-sense initiatives and solutions that empower families and communities to make healthy decisions for their kids." The initiative will have four main focuses: healthy school lunches, better physical education programs, affordability and better access to healthy foods, and a consumer campaign to publicize the issue.

The First Lady begins the battle against obesity in the public school system. School lunches are known for their less than optimal choices which typically include pizza, cheese sticks, hamburgers, and other unhealthy options. The First Lady would like for school systems to step up the level of nutrition served in cafeterias. Many school systems across the country no longer offer sugary juices, cookies, and chips, but instead they promote nutritious and filling "extras" such as fruits and yogurts. Mrs. Obama applauds these efforts and hopes many schools will follow their example. Additionally, the First Lady argues that improved physical education programs would entice children to

First Ladies Throughout the Ages

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The title "first lady" refers to the woman who serves as hostess to the White House. She is typically the wife of the President. From the early roots of American history, "first ladies" have served the nation by promoting a philanthropic passion to the American population. Here are the chosen movements of several famous first ladies throughout the years:

- Dolley Madison created the role of "first lady." She promoted the welfare of orphans. Her most famous contribution was saving the portrait of Washington when the White House caught fire.
- Eleanor Roosevelt traveled the nation and attended functions for Franklin Roosevelt when he was too ill.
- Pat Nixon encouraged volunteering.
- Lady Bird Johnson advocated beautification of the nation's highways and environmentalism.
- Rosalyn Carter championed for those with disabilities.
- Nancy Reagan created the "Just Say No" anti-drug movement.
- Laura Bush campaigned to promote child literacy and create malaria awareness.
- Michelle Obama is now addressing and advocating for a reduction of childhood obesity.

get up and exercise. Many children simply come home from school, have a snack, maybe do their homework, and plop down in front of the television, game console, or computer when they should be outdoors playing. Children need a lot of physical activity to properly grow and maintain their health and their favorite activities provide none.

The official launch of the initiative will take place in mid-February according to White House press releases. Mrs. Obama has a great campaign, but her goals are ambitious, stretching across the nation. She argues, however, that her passion for the campaign and personal interest as a parent will help her make this a success. The First Lady says, reported by Nanci Hellmich of USA Today, "When I tuck my girls into bed at night, I think about wanting them to be happy and healthy, and have every chance to follow their aspirations. What I want for my daughters is what I want for every child in America," and she truly seems to mean it.

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