

Campaign to fight childhood obesity takes entire nation

Former President Bill Clinton and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee are from different political parties, but they've teamed up on a new campaign: battling childhood obesity.

The American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation have partnered to create the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and together with Governor Huckabee, the Alliance is dedicated to stopping the rise in childhood obesity by 2010 and teaching all children about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Black parents and all parents need to join this fight to protect our children's health.

What's the issue? Experts estimate 16 percent of American children are currently overweight—more than 11 million. They're especially alarmed because just like for American adults, these numbers are rising rapidly.

The rate has doubled for children over the 25 years, and tripled for teenagers. Some adults may see a heavy child as a sign of a healthy eater, or might think of weight as mostly connected to looks. But we need to be reminded that there are serious risks for some overweight children that go far beyond teasing on the playground.

Diseases once associated only with adults, such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, are on the rise at younger and younger ages. Overweight children are also estimated to have a 70 percent chance of being overweight adults. So for many children, this may be more than just a "chubby" phase they'll someday outgrow. Instead, they may be getting set up for a lifetime of the increased health risks that come with being overweight.

The most pressing one, cardiovascular disease, remains the leading killer in America, and if the trends in childhood obesity continue experts predict they could cut two to five years off the average American lifespan.

There are many reasons childhood obesity is on the rise. For one, American children are immersed in the same "supersize me" culture that snares adults, surrounded by high-calorie, high-fat food that's plentiful, cheap, and often served in unrealistically big portions. Today's children and teenagers are also less likely than past generations to spend free time running around outdoors and more likely to spend it on the couch watching television or playing video games, often with snacks and sodas right next to them. Even schools have been blamed as part of the problem.

Many districts have cut back on gym time and even recess. The quality of school meals and easy availability of snacks and soft drinks in many school vending machines have been some of the first targets in the new war on child obesity, and one of the places there's already been progress.

A number of school districts and state legislatures are pushing to improve the health content of school breakfasts and lunches and ban or limit the unhealthy products children are able to buy instead of meals, cutting down on the number of children who right now grab a candy bar and soda from the machine in the hallway and call that "lunch." In response to growing pressure around the issue, the three largest soft drink companies recently agreed to new voluntary limits on the types of drinks they'll distribute in schools.

They'll now focus on providing milk, 100 percent juice, and bottled water to elementary and middle school students, with a few other low-calorie choices like diet sodas or sports drinks added for older students. This may be just one piece of the puzzle, but advocates are hoping as more people become aware of the current risks to children's health, more and more industries, schools, restaurants, and communities will make positive changes like this one that will add up to make a big difference for America's children.

Even with these kinds of changes in children's environments, the biggest influence in their habits will come from the same place it always has: Home. Parents have always been the ones to tell their children to eat more green vegetables or get some fresh air. We know our beautiful children come in all shapes and sizes, but by being aware of the serious health risks some overweight children do face and the long-term value of a balanced diet and regular exercise for all children, we can help make sure all our children grow up to be the healthiest they can be.

Making healthy food and exercise part of family life is the right place to start—and will be good for many adults too! Teaching good habits to children early can have lifelong consequences, and someday our children—and grandchildren—will thank us.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and Founder of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Celebrating black America's political emancipation

The 2006 midterm elections will provide more than just who will control the United States Senate and House of Representatives. Ideological stances that may underpin the positions held by Presidential candidates in the 2008 General Election may find legitimacy in the November 2006 vote.

Hence, considering the closeness of the vote in President George Bush's first Presidential Election, the Republican Party cannot afford to continue to shun African American voters and stay in power.

It is common knowledge that the real acid test of party support is to demonstrate that a minority candidate can win in a statewide race. The two key races that show mainstream legitimacy for minority candidates are the gubernatorial race and the US Senate race. At present, the Democratic Party has the high ground because they have elected two people of African American descent to the United States Senate (Carol Moseley Braun 1993-1999 and Barack Obama 2005 - present), and one, (Douglas Wilder 1990-1994) as governor of Virginia.

The Republican Party has elected only one major statewide candidate, Honorable Edward W. Brooke - Massachusetts the first African American elected to the United States Senate in 1966.

Illinois has elected two different people of African American descent to the US Senate. This suggests that white America is ready to start viewing blacks as mainstream politicians and not mere black politicians. Black politicians can win in districts overwhelmingly black but their caustic rhetoric may not make them palatable in Mainstream America. Hence, the key political feat for tomorrow's black politicians is to learn to maintain their black voter base while presenting a mainstream agenda that meets the needs of Mainstream America.

Although the Democrats have the high ground on electing key statewide candidates, the present black enchantment with the Democratic Party needs a bit of discussion. In a July 26, 2006 article, Demoning the GOP at NAACP, Jeff Jacoby of The Boston Globe offers Black Americans plenty to ponder.

"Look around Black candidates are serious contenders for governor in three states this year, and two of them -- Lynn Swann in Pennsylvania and Kenneth Blackwell in Ohio -- are Republicans. The third, Democrat Deval Patrick, is running in Massachusetts, a quintessentially blue state that has managed to elect only one African-American to statewide office in its entire history: former U.S. Senator Edward Brooke -- a Republican."

Jacoby offers the Democratic Party sins of yesterday that somehow got ignored by the black political zealots to where today's black mono-political stances are foolishly at best when seeking opportunities to upgrade the living standards of the African American community.

"[Julian] Bond may not share Republican principles or priorities, but for him to cast the GOP as the party of fascism and racism is surreal. After all, it was the Democratic Party that defended slavery, the Democratic Party that supported the Dred Scott decision, and the Democratic Party that opposed the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. It was Democrats who founded the Ku Klux Klan, Democrats who repeatedly blocked anti lynching bills, and Democrats who enacted Jim Crow segregation across the South."

Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael Steele (Republican) is running for the U.S. Senate in the 2006 election. His candidacy adds to the Republican Party's effort to enfranchise African American voters once again in their party. Listening at Steel present his platform to a gathering of Delaware black Republicans called "The Underground Republican Network of Delaware" (T.U.R.N.) offered an opportunity to watch a black politician operate as a conduit between white and black America versus being a political octofoon. I asked him to give his positions on illegal immigration and political gridlock in the US Congress.

Steele seemed to align with the position of the US House of Representatives that we first need to get control of our borders before offering special treatment for the illegal immigrants who are here now. He brought up the vexing problem of what to do with the illegal parents of American citizens (children born in this country). Steele did not see the government getting into the foster care business. However, I ask, what does the government do for the children when US citizens are sent to prison for committing crimes? Perhaps Steele's position is underpinned by the 2004 US Department of Health & Human Services report Children of Incarcerated Parents: Research and Resources."

SHERMAN MILLER is a syndicated columnist.



SHERMAN MILLER

U.S. not talking to nations at center of major world crises

By Barry Schweid

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — There is an axiom in diplomatic circles that "You don't make peace with your friends; you make peace with your enemies."

The United States, which doesn't lack for enemies these days, is not talking to North Korea, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah or Hamas — all of which are central to the Bush administration's chief overseas problems of the moment.

While each situation is different, the Bush administration's underlying position is that Iran, North Korea and Syria must change their policies and Hezbollah and Hamas are terrorist groups. That means they all are legally off-limits to diplomatic discourse.

Critics say this absence of communication restricts U.S. diplomacy and makes U.S. allies anxious because they believe there is no way of resolving most crises without American participation.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, who helped shape a far different U.S. foreign policy as national security assistant for President Jimmy Carter, responded tartly when asked to appraise the Bush administration stance.

"Bush and Rice are pursuing a remarkably successful policy of self-ostracism," he said, speaking of George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice. "Unfortunately it is a disaster for the United States."

Madeleine Albright, who was secretary of state for President Bill Clinton in his second term, said "the stakes are too high" to avoid contact with Iran and Syria, whom the State Department for years has designated as sponsors of terrorism.

"Engagement is not appeasement," Albright said. "Diplomacy is a mechanism for the U.S. to send a tough message."

A former career U.S. diplomat in the Middle East, Edward S. Walker, said "neither side wants to have a conversation" over the current fighting.

Yet, Walker said in an interview, "The tragedy of this administration is it doesn't know how to use diplomacy. It seems to be actually clueless."

The Bush administration's policies have been criticized by some Republicans, too. In a speech Friday at the Brookings Institution in Washington, Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel suggested U.S. support for Israel was coming at the expense of U.S. relations with Muslims and Arabs.

Whether Syria and Iran were directly involved in Hezbollah and Hamas aggression in Israel, Hagel said, "Both countries exert influence in the region."

"As we work with our friends and allies to deny Syria and Iran any opportunity to further corrode the situation in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, both Damascus and Tehran must hear from America directly," he said.

Bush administration officials say direct negotiations with regimes such as Iran, North Korea and Syria would be fruitless. White House spokesman Tony Snow has specifically ruled out talking to Iran and Syria because they support Hezbollah.

The administration has made its views clear to both governments, and "Frankly, there is nothing to negotiate," Snow said last week.

Syria, which with Iran is a pivotal supporter of the Hezbollah guerrillas, has been pursued by successive administrations for more than three decades for Middle East peacemaking. But it has been sidelined by the United States as fighting between Israel and Hezbollah rages into its third week.

"The track record stinks," Snow said of past U.S. efforts to negotiate with Syria.

Syria also is close to Hamas, the radical group that controls the Palestinian government and whose fighters kidnapped an Israeli soldier last month, helping prompt Israeli incursions into Gaza.

The Syrian ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, told The Associated Press last week his country had not heard from the United States. He said Syria would like to get started on a comprehensive Middle East peace effort that extends beyond the current fighting in Lebanon.

"Syria does not consider itself an enemy of the United States," Moustapha said.

Rice has told Iran there will be no talks on its nuclear program unless it suspends enrichment of uranium.

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THE BOONDOCKS
by Aaron McGruder

I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS - IT AIN'T FAIR!!

WHY DO I GOTTA SUFFER AND PAY BLES? I GOT NO TIME FOR LIVING "AVERAGE" I AINT GOT NO CAR, NO JEWELRY, NO YACHT - NOTHING!! I WANT MINE'S NOW!!

YOU KNOW, A POET NAMED KAY RYAN ONCE SAID, "WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED IT POSSIBLE THAT WAITING IS SUSTAINABLE, A PLACE WITH ITS OWN HARVESTS."

FOR THAT IN TIME'S FULNESS THE DIAMONDS OF PATIENCE COULDN'T BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE GENUINE IN BRILLIANCE OR HARDNESS."

IT MEANS YOU'RE A NERD AND POETRY IS STUPID. MEANWHILE, I NEED A SCHEME TO COP SOME REAL DIAMONDS AND A CONVERTIBLE JAG BY THE FOURTH GRADE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT MEANS?

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