



MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

16 July 2012

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Boehner, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As members of MISSION: READINESS, we write in support of the process through which the USDA seeks to update nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages sold in schools. Improving the school food environment based on the latest science is a critical element of a comprehensive approach to reducing childhood obesity and preserving our military readiness.

MISSION: READINESS is the national security organization of more than 300 retired admirals and generals and other senior military leaders who have mobilized in response to Department of Defense figures indicating that 75 percent of all young Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 are unable to join the military because they are medically or physically unfit, are too poorly educated, or have disqualifying criminal records. We support targeted investments proven to help reduce these barriers and enable kids to succeed later in life, whether in the military or in other chosen employment.

Excess body fat has become the leading medical disqualifier for military service. Today, roughly one quarter of all Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 are too heavy to enlist. If left unchecked, our nation's troubles with weight could seriously undermine future recruiting efforts.

Moreover, the Department of Defense spends an estimated \$1.1 billion per year for medical care associated with excess fat and obesity. In a dramatic move to address this problem, the military is bringing healthier foods to its schools, dining facilities, and vending machines, but it can't win this fight alone. The civilian sector needs to do its part.

Improved nutrition standards will ensure that parents' efforts to raise their children with well-balanced diets and a healthy lifestyle are not continually undermined by junk food sold at schools. Children consume up to half of their daily calories during school hours, and the childhood years lay the foundation for lifelong eating habits -- for better or for worse.

That is why in 2010, MISSION: READINESS strongly supported passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. In this bipartisan, historic legislation Congress instructed the USDA to revise outdated nutrition standards for: 1) school meals; and 2) competitive foods and beverages sold in school cafeterias, vending machines, and school stores, so that they would be consistent with the latest science.

Per Congress' instruction, the USDA is now addressing competitive foods and beverages. We are writing to express our support for allowing this established process to move forward unimpeded. More specifically, we ask that Congress rely first and foremost on the advice of the nation's top nutrition experts and resist any appeals to weaken these rules by continuing to allow the sale of junk food to children in schools. What we call on you to do is the right thing for our nation's security and for the health and wellbeing of America's children.

Very respectfully,

[Members of MISSION: READINESS]

Cc: All members of the United States Congress

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