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Contact: David Carrier

Phone: 202-464-5362, dcarrier@missionreadiness.org

**Retired Generals and Admirals Call Junk Food Sold at School
A National Security Threat**

New report shows schools sell 400 billion calories of junk food every year

WASHINGTON, DC (September 25, 2012)—Schools are selling 400 billion calories of junk food every year—the equivalent of nearly two billion candy bars and more than the weight of the aircraft carrier *Midway*—according a new report from Mission: Readiness, a group of more than 300 retired generals and admirals. The report, entitled *Still Too Fat to Fight*, calls for stronger standards for foods and beverages sold at school.

“Childhood obesity is more than just a health issue, it is also a national security issue,” said retired US Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, who served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2001 to 2005. “Seventy-five percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military and being overweight or obese is the number one medical reason why young adults cannot enlist.”

Joining General Myers to release the report at the National Press Club were James M. Loy, Admiral, US Coast Guard (Retired), former Commandant of the US Coast Guard and former Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security; Norman R. Seip, Lieutenant General, US Air Force (Retired); Belinda H. Pinckney, Brigadier General, US Army (Retired); and Charles E. Milam, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, U.S. Department of Defense.

The retired military leaders are focused on improving school nutrition because many children get up to half of their daily calories during school hours. The Institute of Medicine recently called for schools to be a national focal point for obesity prevention.

“We cannot succeed in teaching our children to eat healthier foods while selling them 400 billion empty calories of junk food in our schools every year,” said General Myers. “When schools sell candy and sugary drinks in cafeterias and vending machines, it works against national efforts to serve healthier school meals and parents’ efforts to help their children develop healthier lifelong eating habits.”

There is now strong evidence that replacing junk food with healthier food choices can be part of the solution to the childhood obesity epidemic, the retired military leaders said. When New York City, the country’s largest school district, stopped selling junk food in its schools and made other improvements in nutrition, physical activity and child- and parent-education both in the schools and city-wide, rates of obesity among its kindergarten through eighth-grade children dropped by 5.5 percent district-wide in just four years.

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1212 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005

202.464.5224

MissionReadiness.org

Other places, such as Philadelphia and the state of Mississippi, are also beginning to see meaningful progress in reducing childhood weight problems.

In addition, a recent study published in the journal *Pediatrics* shows that state laws removing junk food from school vending machines, stores, and lunch lines are associated with reduced weight gain among children.

The retired generals and admirals of Mission: Readiness strongly supported passage of the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to take two steps related to child nutrition in school: the first is to update nutrition standards for school meal programs and the second is to update the standards for “competitive foods” sold in vending machines, school stores and à la carte items in the cafeteria.

Last year, after the USDA had worked on the first step to update nutrition standards for school meals, Congress overrode nutrition experts and ordered the USDA to continue to treat tomato paste on pizza as a vegetable in school lunches. While the group of retired military leaders called the Congressional action a mistake, they supported the USDA’s overall plan announced earlier this year as an important step forward in reducing calories, fat and sodium in school meals.

The USDA is now working on the second step of updating the decades-old standards for food sold outside of the school meal program to reflect the latest nutrition science.

At the press conference, the retired military brass also released a letter to Congress signed by more than 200 retired generals and admirals in support of the process through which the USDA seeks to update nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages sold in schools.

“Removing the junk food from our schools should be part of comprehensive action that involves parents, schools and communities in helping children make healthy food choices,” said Admiral Loy. “The bottom line is that the armed services must have a sufficient pool of fit young adults to draw from in order to field enough recruits with the excellent qualifications needed to staff a 21st century military.”

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MISSION: READINESS is the nonpartisan national security organization of senior retired military leaders calling for smart investments in America’s children. It operates under the umbrella of the nonprofit Council for a Strong America.

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