HOSA SPEECH

FOR

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“Taste cannot be controlled by law.” Those words were spoken by Thomas Jefferson in what clearly had to have been an era way before current society began its dialogue… or debate… on the merits versus the downside of the government’s involvement in what you and I can eat, and whether or not those words were determined for a similar discussion as the one that occupies our collective conscience, it is thought provoking. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you all for the opportunity to allow me to represent my point of view on this matter. Although I am a high school student, I am interested in the effects of government control on the lives of its citizens and (**Do you want to make a little joke?**)…. pun intended, this argument **takes the cake**!! How intrusive should the laws of the land be regarding ones everyday choices and tastes? There’s clearly an issue, but what are the realistic solutions?

I personally believe that the government should NOT have a say… if by “A SAY” it means **direct** influence in someone’s dietary choices. Forcing an edict upon the population does not work. Education, incentives, information and awareness of consequences might work. It is clear that the prevalence of obesity is a growing issue for the American people and many factors contribute to the problem. It is also clear that there are nutrition experts and some politicians that see the problem and might believe that one solution would be to institute enforced national directives limiting choice, but that is not the way in which a free society works.

It was Benjamin Franklin who said, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” All people from all walks of life must be considered when a serious national problem is up for scrutiny, review and resolution as we are all affected by this epidemic. There is no region or socio-economic sector immune to the negative effects of obesity.

How would government mandates be structured? How would they be enforced? What would control look like? What would the consequences be for ordering a SECOND sixteen-ounce soft drink? How is “quota” regulated? Is this being done “for our own good?” WHAT IS our own good? How much control over our lives should the government be allowed to have? Would government controls be in the best interests of the public or would the benefits of such programs lie in the hands of big industry and large campaign donors? How much influence should major corporate lobbies be allowed to have on our lives? Adults should be able to make informed choices and those of us that are too young to choose should have responsible and informed adults guiding us and not forcing us to live a certain way.

We have seen and experienced regulatory failures in the past. In the 1920’s Prohibition laws were, in effect, not so effective. There is a story that tells us that when, in 1929, the mayor of Berlin visited New York City, he asked Mayor Walker when Prohibition would go into effect. This was something of an embarrassing situation considering that the law had been in effect since January 1920, or almost ten years. And even though there were previous laws similar to these that were to be observed by the populace, history had proven that people found ways…. there is a story, according to PBS on their description of the film “Prohibition” by Ken Burns, that when, in 1844, a town in Massachusetts banned the sale of alcohol, one tavern owner had the ingenious idea of charging admission to his bar in order to see a striped pig. With admission came free alcoholic beverages! What can we say? Condemn the transgression but praise the ingenuity?

Common sense and effective solutions must be created, researched, and implemented in an organic and informed fashion. No one knows everything there is to know and there is not one catch all solution to fit everyone faced with this problem or any problem. …And make no mistake… EVERYONE is faced with this problem. Any changes or actions will set a chain of events, or reactions, into motion. Obesity is a serious and growing issue and it involves all of us but solutions cannot target or shame the obese. That will not work. Dietary alternatives are complicated solutions to complex problems. We cannot allow coercion to adopt new rules lead to forfeiture of individual rights.

There is positive movement, however. Entire industries are being built around consumer demand for healthy living- from more widespread offering of more nutritious foods, to weight loss programs, to consumer education on nutrition, caloric intake, and ramifications of obesity, the point is that people need to understand what the problem is and what the consequences might be. As concerned and responsible adults, it’s important that everyone work together to understand the importance of partnership in finding affordable, realistic, lasting solutions and in supporting family, friends and neighbors that require more encouragement.

Government directives concerning our diets are a waste of money, time and effort and they are an intrusion on our dignity as human beings. Such centralization must be resisted or we risk increased bureaucracy, inflexibility and ultimately decline. (**I don’t see where Calvin Coolidge said this and would not cite him if it is not an actual quote or paraphrase**). I urge you to consider what I have said as we find the solutions that support our selves, our communities, and ultimately our nation. Thank you all.