

**The Challenge of Obesity for Policy Makers:
Recommendations for the Next Administration
Obesity Society
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SALLY SQUIRES: -for 24 years, I was a health and medical reporter at the Washington Post and the founder of the Lean Plate Club which was a column and online web chat, and email newsletter, and a lot of other things but multimedia effort related to helping readers and others just eat smart and move more. We'd like to say small changes add up to big rewards and that's much of what you've been hearing here today for those of you have been here. We've had a stellar panel and we have another great panel ahead and I'd like to introduce them now.

We have immediately to my right, the Honorable Representative John Conyers Jr., who is a Detroit Democrat and he was reelected to the 14th Congressional District in November 2006, I'm sorry, to his 21st term in the House of Representatives. He is the second most senior member in the House of Representatives. Congressman Conyers was elected by his congressional colleagues to lead as chairman of the pivotal House Committee on the Judiciary. He is also one of the 13 founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus and is considered the dean of that group.

We also have today, Jim Rex, also known as the Last Democrat Standing, I think, in South Carolina, is that right?

[Laughter] Okay, all right, sitting. Sorry, okay and he became the state's 16th state superintendent of education

which is an elected job on January 10th 2007 and immediately went to work on his agenda to accelerate innovation in schools, reform accountability, ensure success, and expand public schools' choices for parents and students. He is a former high school English teacher and for all of us who love words, thank you. You know you fostered our love of English, a football coach and this many other past titles that you can read about in the program.

And we also have with us Mayor R.T. Rybak. He was the first elected mayor of Minneapolis, I'm sorry, in 2001. But maybe even more importantly, he's a tri-athlete, an active swimmer and biker and was the 2006 Fittest Mayor in America [laughter] which is pretty impressive and that was by Men's Fitness Magazine and that's based on both his personal lifestyle and his support of healthy public policies and also he became mayor in his first run for office which is really also pretty impressive.

So, we have a terrific group and I'm going to pitch them some questions and hope that they're going to answer some things but I also hope we have a microphone that is out there in the audience. We'd love to have you participate in this and just for those of you who have joined us, this session is being webcast by the Kaiser Family Foundation or rather it's being recorded and will be later webcast by the Kaiser Family Foundation on their homepage or on their

website so that you'll be able to either review this later at a later date or tell others about it which we hope you will do because we think these are extremely important issues.

I should also say that I'd be remiss if I didn't say that my new place of employment is at Weber Shandwick and I thank them for letting me come here and part of this. I'm now Director of Health and Wellness Communications there and that's a strategic communications company.

So, with that— oh, and what I'd like to pitch to you three gentlemen is how are your communities right now responding to the obesity epidemic and are they doing enough? So, who would like to start?

JIM REX: I will be happy to make a couple of really brief comments. The second question I can answer easily. No, we're not doing enough. In the State of South Carolina though, we do have some recent legislation that does require in all of our elementary schools a minimum of 30 minutes a day physical activity. That's not enough but at least now we have a baseline or requirement that we can point to.

We also have built into physical education and health and fitness standards and many of you know about the movement nationwide to have curriculum standards and what are typically called the core disciplines. I think this is a major step forward to have standards that are accessed in the area of health and physical fitness.

So, we're making some progress. We need to do more and I think one of the challenges we have and I suspect many others do around the country is that we have this crosscurrents. We have an accountability system. No child left behind accountability systems also at the state level with these standardized tests and high stakes accountability that are sometimes driving out of the curriculum some of the things that are equally important such as physical fitness and health, the arts, and other areas. So, we've got to figure out how to balance those priorities within our public school system.

SALLY SQUIRES: Congressman Conyers, what about you? How does this work in your community and are we doing enough?

REP. JOHN CONYERS (D-MICH.): Well, I don't want to make Michigan sound like it's a laggard state but I don't know [laughter]. But I know they must be doing something.

But the thing that's disturbing me this morning is not how much they're doing about obesity, its how much they're doing about the systems in the delivery of healthcare in the United States. Supposed they were doing everything, what difference would it make? Forty-seven million people don't have a dime's worth of insurance and 50 million who are insured of the total insured in this country are under-insured. This only- we may get on top of obesity but what about all the other problems and disparities that we have?

So, I come here in a more global, more holistic frame of mind than most anybody here in this auditorium today. Obesity is one of the disparities but asking me how we're doing in our community, we're the most under-insured, poorest, most uneducated category of citizens in the United States of America. We're doing terrible, thank you for asking.

But getting on top of obesity through educational devices and all that, to me maybe hides the bigger truth, is that we've got a culture that is hell bent on feeding us all the junk to do all the unhealthy things that could ever be devised and they're devising more as we speak.

So, we may hear today the same. Well, let's get on top of it. Let's educate people and then kids turn on the TV and so do we, and what do you get? Some more ways to be unhealthy and of course, now, thanks to PR people like maybe your organization, they're defending it.

I mean, you don't have to apologize for wanting two slices of cherry pie and you don't have to exercise all that much, really. I mean, there are health wants and nuts that they'd go for all that, but you could be healthy without it and you could be fat too by the way. You don't have to be embarrassed or think that your health is in jeopardy.

Well, look, we've got a cultural problem and a health systemic problem and until we get around to that, it's not

clear to me what we're going to do to help improve the situation that we're in.

SALLY SQUIRES: What would you like to see— what would the first step be that you would like to see, Congressman? And then I think I know you don't— have limited time with us and have another engagement. So, I don't want to take your time too long, but what would you like to see happen?

REP. JOHN CONYERS (D-MICH.): Well, I'd like to see what happened between the first panel and the second panel is that one of the distinguished doctors of the medical school invited me to come to his medical school with a panel of doctors and professors as I've done at other medical schools, and we have a discussion about healthcare and what's wrong? What I'd like to see done? To have a health system that's worth the name.

You need to have a system where there's a family physician for every family, available to every family. And until you get there, well, there'll always be a few healthy mayors in America and there'll be doctors. You know, there are always a few people. I'd like to consider myself the healthiest congressman in the congress but the whole point of it is that the health system is really in a war with the culture which is telling us, hey, yes, go to the Obesity Conference in Denver and then come on out. So, yes and you

got some good facts, right? And now you know a lot more about these problems than you ever did before.

But in the congress, we have a group of members working on disparities. The minority disparities are worse than everybody else is in every category particularly health and I always amuse myself with this as I watched the Olympics and other sports. I mean some of the greatest athletes are African-Americans and they come out of a community that has the worst health statistics of any other ethnic group in the United States of America, hands down.

And so, we have members in Congress that are working on disparities, obesity, TB, this and that. And they say well, yes, the health system. Conyers, you're absolutely right. We got to do something about this health. But in the meantime, we got to fix this disparity. Whites are living 10 years longer. Other groups have 1/20th of the disease rate that we have.

This and that, hey, if you don't change the system, you might move the rate of deaths, birthrate, you may move that down a little bit. But to me, what's the difference? We've got to all approach these and put all these things in the basket and say, by golly, we've got to change the way health systems are run in this country and I close with this observation.

Doctors have more usually been trained to be good doctors, good caregivers. They're good bedside. They're good at hospitals. They're good pediatricians. They're good at surgery. They're good, good, good. But when you come to the system of healthcare, actually, I don't know, what do you mean? What are you talking about? Oh, you're talking about those terrible rates, that reimbursement for Medicaid where it costs us to take a Medicaid patient in most parts of the United States now, a doctor to take a person on Medicaid that means that money goes out of his clinic or office.

Medicare, not much better, and of course you got some of the more conservative-minded people in the congress saying, hey, let's privatize Medicare. Where did you hear that one? Let's privatize Medicare. That was so silly it didn't even get out the back.

But they say we haven't given up yet. Let's trim Medicare down and let's make less options available. Let's make more services unavailable and certainly don't lower the age. We don't want to take in any more people. And by the way, while we're at it, let's not let anymore kids get healthcare. What was SCHIP all about?

Well, let's add 10 million kids. They said, 10 million kids! What are they needed for? Those are middle class families. They can afford healthcare, like let them pay like everybody else and if they haven't, let them get employer-based

insurance. So, as soon as the employer skips out to the Far East, there goes not only your job and your pension but your healthcare plan as well.

SALLY SQUIRES: Well, thank you very much, Congressman. We are so glad that you could be with us and really appreciate your thoughts. You've certainly had a lot of experience in this area. And we know that you have a very busy schedule and very much appreciate you taking the time to be with us today.

REP. JOHN CONYERS (D-MICH.): Well, thank you for letting me get this off my chest. [Applause] I'm feeling much better now, thank you very much.

JIM REX: Let's hope you're healthier.

REP. JOHN CONYERS (D-MICH.): Yes, I'm feeling much healthier. [Laughter]

SALLY SQUIRES: So, and Mayor Rybak, how does this fit with your experience?

R.T. RYBAK: [Inaudible] by taking you into two schools because I think it's important when you're looking at the future to do that. The mic is on?

SALLY SQUIRES: Going to make sure you—

R.T. RYBAK: How about now?

SALLY SQUIRES: Yes.

R.T. RYBAK: Is that better? Okay. What I wanted to do to explain to you is really to take you in a couple different schools and one of them is Northeast Middle School in

Minneapolis. A school, very diverse school, middle income to lower income students there, and remarkable learning going on. They're part of a school system where they speak a hundred languages in our city. We have a largest Somali population of any city outside of Mogadishu. It's a very, very diverse place.

And all morning long, when I was a principal for a day there, I saw great things happening and everyone is in the lunchroom and these kids, these incredibly bright kids were making great choices all throughout the day went up to a cafeteria line that had extraordinarily poor options for them and made really bad choices within those options.

And as I talked to these bright kids I've seen in classrooms, as they were eating their lunch of nachos and processed cheese, I realized we had to create more opportunities for them. So, let me take you into another school.

This is Loring School, the community school with basically the same population. And this is an elementary school, but there are two wonderful women who live in that community and they've launched the program called Kids Cook. And in this one is two remarkable volunteers in this case that have taken the front grounds of the school and turned it into a farm.

And the kids from all populations have learned how to grow their vegetables. They learned quite a bit about where their food comes from. And then with these two women, who happen to have a catering company and are gourmet cooks, learned how to prepare not just okay meals but superb meals with fresh produce and they know where it came from. It came from their hands and the sun and the water that they put on it and they connected to it. And so they went home and part of what they have done is reintroduce family dinner into these communities.

Now, if you take those two experiences and you'll really recognize what they're about. I think what it says is that there are ways of doing this right and ways of doing it wrong. My community is doing a lot. But like every other community, there is much more of the first than the second. The mainstream popular culture is obviously much more a part of that school eating the nachos and then not having a family dinner than the one with the other values.

So, how do we really do that as government officials? Well, one of the things that I think is really important with government officials is to really stop thinking about our citizens as customers. I came out of the private sector. Customers with really good relationship, it sounds good. Citizens and residence are not our customers, they are our partners.

And this is extremely important in this field, I believe, because it is really very much about government getting into a partnership to enable people to make those right decisions. I'm blessed with some great talent on my staff. One of them is Jeremy Hanson who is here with me today. Before coming to my office, he was a veteran of the smoke-free movement and also the HIV/AIDS movement, great examples of government putting good options in the people's hands. And they were not about saying, here, you lay on the couch and you just keep getting fat and I'll figure out some way to make it better." That's not what this is going to be about.

So, one of the things that we've done in our communities is we're luckily recipients of the STEPS Grant, that is from helping them and services grant that has allowed us to do some very good grass roots, things in our community. They have included, for instance, stimulating a number of community-based markets and farmer's markets throughout our community.

It also helped us launch Get Fit Twin Cities, which is a citywide effort that has allowed us to do challenges. So a school or business or my office versus the city council will challenge others to be a part of being a fit community.

We have launched a wellness program within the public school for that. We also are very active now and beginning to launch safe routes to school which really begins the day, and

hopefully, it ends the day with young people being about getting up and moving forward. There's much more that can and should be done.

The biggest thing, though, that I think we need to do is to really connect up the choices people are making. And I think the holy grail of everything right now is local food, and certainly where the food is coming from in general. I represent a city that is what it is because it became the milling capital of the world at one point and give rise to General Mills and Pillsbury because we're surrounded by rich agricultural land and yet the food that goes on our table comes from all over the place is not connected to that. And if more kids understood what those kids at Loring did, we wouldn't be having this problem.

SALLY SQUIRES: Superintendent Rex, is this kind of model possible in your state? I've heard in my reporting days that, and I have many southern relatives so I'm not pointing a finger at the south necessarily, but it's sometimes quipped that gravy is considered a beverage in the south [laughter]. And so, how do you get around these important cultural foods and these habits? What are you doing and how does what your doing fit with what they're doing in Minneapolis?

JIM REX: Well, in fried chickens or fruit.

SALLY SQUIRES: Okay. [Laughter]

R.T. RYBAK: Yes.

JIM REX: Well, I think the problems are nationwide. I think both the congressman and the mayor talked about that in terms of the way we're being bombarded about choices. In our state, we have some student-parent tasting panels that are helping them rethink what kinds of food should be made available in their respective schools.

We have a statewide campaign that is based on your slogan, *Eat Smart Move More SC* and we're doing public service announcements across the state regarding that. So, trying to change the culture and in terms of these choices is a challenge in every state, not just South Carolina. It is in your state too, I know.

You know, one of the things that I think we can do through the public schools is to give parents and students more choices around these options. You know it's one thing, in my state for example, we have nearly 1,200 public schools, almost 700,000 children. And, trying to change all of that at the same time is going to be very difficult. But we are pushing what we call a choice group in public school system which gives parents and students many more options like the ones you talked about, R.T., I think.

You know, we're talking about outdoor schools. There's a great book called *The Last Child in the Woods*. You know, about how our kids are getting disconnected from the natural world which translates into less exercise. So, we have a new

partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and these are like magnet schools. But the magnet schools, the parents and kids can choose that would have many more outdoor activities built into the curriculum but also the extra curriculum, kayaking, scuba diving, sporting clays, all kinds of things that would attract certain kids and get them more active.

I think we should also have but we don't yet some magnet school options for parents who want their children to be immersed in the agricultural experience and learning where food comes from. It's amazing how many of our kids think potatoes grow in trees, all kinds of things like that. They think food comes in cellophane. And so, we could have magnet schools that would immediately start to draw parents and students to them for these enriched activities that would deal with the fitness and health issue.

Just a couple other quick things that haven't been touched on yet, if we're going to change how our population thinks about their health and their wellness, their fitness and their personal responsibility for it, the schools are one of the great places to start, obviously. We know that the sooner you start this or it is building these attitudes and beliefs.

But, our teaching staff, if you look at the teachers in our state, and I think this is true around the country, you will find in large part an overworked, overstressed, under-

active group of professionals. And so, you can't just talk about what's good for the kids here, you have to talk about what's good for those teachers, those models that are working with them everyday. And we know the people who take care of themselves function better. Kids do better academically. Teachers do better in terms of instruction.

One of the things we're doing in our state, we're creating a renewal center for our teaching force. And it has nothing to do with college credit or certification or anything else. It's a one-week experience in the mountains, northern part of South Carolina, it's an outdoor experience primarily and teachers go to this one-week experience, it's open 50 weeks a year as teams. And before they go, they establish wellness and fitness objectives for their team. Otherwise, we'll have a lot of heart attacks when they get up to the renewal center [laughter].

So, they walk X number of miles a week. They want to lose X number of pounds of weight as a group. So, they have these wellness goals, fitness goals that they create and then they have other goals that occur during the week, and then of course, when they go back to their schools or districts.

So, I think we have to look at a lot of things simultaneously in terms of how the system now functions if we're going to see the kind of change that I know we all know needs to take place. I mean, I've been watching as everyone

has the summer Olympics. And I was looking at, not just the athletes; I was looking at the Chinese citizens who were there in the Bird's Nest at the events. You don't see a lot of obesity. [Interposing] and you see a fairly active group of people who are not overweight. And you could see that in a lot of cultures. And that's what I think we have to shoot forward.

The public school system, as the mayor said, can really help in this area. You know, we've asked our public schools to do lots of things, support our democracy, inculcate democratic values, close the achievement gap, make us internationally competitive, get rid of poverty.

This is another thing we're asking our public schools to help with. Is it unfair? Probably, the community, the healthcare systems, all the dozen things we have to help make it happen. But it makes sense. I mean, these young human beings are learning about themselves and what it means to be healthy and what it means to be successful.

R.T. RYBAK: Could I cut about now because I think the superintendent is making a great point about this issue of how much responsibility is on school and how much on community. And by the way, thank you for mentioning *The Last Child of the Woods*, this is a book I have never read. I didn't have to because my wife, every other minute, oh, you got to hear this. She read the entire thing aloud to me and she is now part of

helping to form children in major network in Minneapolis, so it's great.

But this whole point is so important. This is a great superintendent. I happen to have a great superintendent and their jobs are monstrous, what they have to do. I'm almost embarrassed to talk to my superintendent about the lunchroom but I have to. But what we really have to recognize is we can't assume that that our schools are going to do what we are not doing in our communities.

Communities must surround our young people with support before and after they get in there. And by the way, this isn't just about kids, ladies and gentlemen. Let's look around at our adult populations in the country. So, what we really have to do is to say, there are great things you can do in schools but they can't do the social engineering we're not willing to do ourselves.

SALLY SQUIRES: So, what are your biggest hurdles? And you also, I mean, in mentioning Minneapolis, you bring to mind this wonderful researcher named Diane Newmark Steiner [misspelled?], who has done work with adolescence at the University of Minnesota. And she has shown that families who eat a meal together, at least three to five times, that their kids do better not only in school, and that meal doesn't have to be dinner, but their kids not only do better in school but

they're also less likely to engage in risky behaviors from taking drugs and alcohol and smoking to early sex.

I mean, it's a very interesting and ongoing study. But what are the hurdles that you see in your communities and why aren't we able to do these better?

R.T. RYBAK: Let me start with that one to talk about the hurdles, that dinner hour is dear to my heart. I got elected, our daughter was 10, and our son was 12. And the biggest single concern I had is this was going to wreck our family.

And so my wife and I really resolved, we will have dinner together, at least four nights a week and up to six. And it has been wonderful but we haven't been quiet about that, we've been very, very vocal about that. And when I come to an event at 7:00, say that I was eating dinner with my family, not to be showy but it is really important to model that behavior and I think that's terribly important.

But what are some of the challenges? Well, one of the things that we'd like to do is to move much more aggressively at this. We're immiscible government. There are limited things you can do within all that. The STEPS Grant was an enormous breakthrough for us.

That grant is running out, so right now, I'm very much wanting to tie safe routes to school to local food to go down the five mile quarter of the city and really be able to

organize that, so the kids are walking to and from school and that's tied to their food and all sorts of things, it's a whole lifestyle. But where in the heck do we find those resources within there. That's one of the big issues.

The second one happens to be— would simply be availability of food within all of these communities. And the reality of the grocery industry is that it underperforms and under— delivers within urban setting, it over charges in urban settings and it's simply harder to get food. I'm really happy to go to my coop and pay a little bit or a lot more for the food that we get but that's not an option in a lot of these cases. So, I think those are few.

SALLY SQUIRES: What about you, Superintendent, what do you think that some of your biggest hurdles are in trying to implement these new changes?

JIM REX: Well, we have to start out with resources. When you have an under-funded system for the other charges that has, the other responsibilities has and then you try to figure out how to address these resources getting away. There's no doubt about it.

The system itself is a problem too. One of my favorite writers is the guy named Marshall McLuhan and he once said, "I don't know who discovered water but I'm absolutely sure it was not a fish." [Laughter]

You know, the system we have, the length of the school day, the way we configurate the school week, the length of the school year confines us in lots of ways that we're probably not very aware of because we've all gone through very similar experiences. We've been fishing that same pond. And that's true with mayors and superintendents and congressman and everyone else.

The system works pretty well if you have parents who are engaged. I mean, if you have one adult in your life, let alone two who engages and spends time and cares about consequences and all of that, kids do pretty well even within the system as a group. But if you don't have that and increasingly large numbers of students and children don't have that, the system doesn't do particularly well the way it's configurated right now.

One of the things that we're pushing hard are teams of teachers who take responsibility for groups of students for more than one academic year. I think the old model of the self-contained classroom the idea that I get in for nine months and then I pass them onto you and pass them on and it's like a lottery. You get a good teacher, hallelujah; you get a bad teacher, oh, my God. And a couple of bad teachers in a row can change the child's life for the worse, couple of great ones in a row can change it for the better.

The other thing about teams is that it gives you, especially if you keep kids for more than one academic year; it gives you some new options in terms of how you connect with parents and how you can connect with communities. You know, teams of teachers can get out and find parents.

You know teachers and principals learn very quickly that if you use the old method of inviting parents to come to school, the ones you want to see the most are the ones you'll least likely to see. And there are lots of legitimate reasons for that. I mean, sometimes there's apathy, but usually it has to do you're a single mother working two jobs, can't get to school.

So, if you want to get the family involved, especially to the level you were talking about with you and your wife are, and they don't have that kind of history, they don't have that kind of background, they may not have that kind of time or resources, the schools are going to have to reach out in new and innovative ways not just in this area but in lots of other areas in terms of academics.

The structure is getting in the way and it's getting in ways that don't necessarily require new resource. I mean, we can do some things differently that wouldn't be all that expensive that would allow us to make these connections and hopefully make these changes that we're talking about usually in isolated instances.

SALLY SQUIRES: So, I'm going to ask this question and throw it open to everyone, is this hopeless or hopeful?

JIM REX: I think it's very hopeful. I think the increasing awareness that we have to be more competitive internationally, we know that. I mean if we are going to be competitive as a nation, as a state, as a city, we're going to have to do a better job. But wouldn't be awful if we save our kids' minds and lost their bodies? I mean, if they're unhealthy and if they can't be productive as workers or as citizens.

You know the fact that they do well in standardized tests; it doesn't going to mean much. And so, I think, there's this growing awareness that in order to have that quality of life we want as well as the economic competition we know we're going to need because of this international tsunami that's coming at us, that we're going to have to start looking and this is not a new word for a whole child. I mean that word has been around for decades, the whole child, not just the academic piece of it.

SALLY SQUIRES: What about you, Mayor Rybak?

R.T. RYBAK: Well, I'm incredibly hopeful about it. I wouldn't feel bad five years ago looking at it but I think something is very different now. I spent a lot of time in schools and one of the things this generation does extremely well is connect the dots.

You know when I talk to adults, they'll say, okay, the things that are on my mind are the economy, the Iraq war, and climate change, three very important issues. Those are not three separate issues to young people. They realize we're in a war for oil and it's created by the fact that we are addicted to oil and if we somehow can figure out a way to get off of oil, our economy won't collapse, the green economy could create jobs, we would bring peace to the planet, they connect the dots, much better than we do as adults.

Now, think about that within the same context that it is really clear that the idea that I happen to have diabetes or I happen to be overweight or I happen to be out of breath are all connected to what I'm sticking in my mouth maybe at the dinner table. That same value that I see of them connecting the dots needs to be done over here. But I again want to go back to that issue of moving from customer to partner.

We really have to figure out ways to do that and I'm really hoping in administration- I'm, by the way, a passionate Obama supporter and have been from the start, so, I'm a little over the top about what I think is going to happen here but I do think that one of the values that I've seen with the Obama campaign all the way through is that it's not just by accident that he's a community organizer, okay. There's a very different way that he looks at this and the people around him

and the values we, who hopefully will surround a new administration from a local level, must do.

We've got to do that at the local level but the federal funds have to flow to the problem. I do a lot of work— we've launched a very ambitious youth violence prevention initiative. There's a lot of federal money if you can put it all together but I want that to come in a stream together so that local units of government that don't have a lot of flexibility can figure that out.

Same with this, that of safe routes to school, touches local food, and touches what we can do with school funding for cafeterias, and touches exercise in a single flow, government should fund through outcome much more through the funding streams. And so, I think that's one way that I really truly believe that this is going to happen.

SALLY SQUIRES: I'd like to throw this open for questions from the audience right now. We have a microphone and I think it's circulating. And, I think, we have a question here and if the microphone isn't available, I'll repeat it because we are recording this for the web and hope this will be on the Kaiser Family Foundation for future viewing. So, if the microphone isn't available, just say your question and I'll repeat it.

SANDY STENMARK, M.D.: I'm Sandy Stenmark [misspelled?] and I'm a pediatrician at Kaiser. I've been very interested in

making changes at schools. One comment and then a question, I'd like the concept of school choice but I think we have to be aware that the tradeoff is that we're having less kids walking into school and biking into school when people are transporting them across town. And I think that is the tradeoff that hasn't— the dots haven't been connected as much.

The question is where do you think we have the best leverage for policy? Do you think it's on the federal level with no child left behind is not my kind of policy but they're thinking of incorporating PE as a core curriculum and the USCH standards for the food that's served in the cafeteria, or the reauthorization of safety routes, to increase safe routes to school, active transports, transit options. Do you think that is the way to attack this problem? Or do you think you are much more effective on the state or local, district-wide to try to make these changes?

SALLY SQUIRES: Could you repeat your question just very, very briefly and we'll get it on the web cast at least. I'm sorry—

SANDY STENMARK, M.D.: It's okay.

JIM REX: Let's see if it sounds the same [laughter].

SANDY STENMARK, M.D.: Let's see if I can remember it.

I'm curious on where you think the best political leverage is to make changes in schools whether it's on the national level through multiple policies like PE curriculum and to no child

left behind, food standards, and safety lieu reauthorization for safe routes to school and more active transport, or do you think it's easier to do changes on the state or district level?

JIM REX: I'll try to make a brief response to you. Part of it will depend on this election in November as to whether or not we have opportunities at the national level to make some real changes. I think the local and the state level opportunities vary tremendously. If you got great leadership like this guy at your city level, things can happen. At some state levels, you can too.

Obviously, it's not either/or. We need it all happening simultaneously. I'm optimistic if we get the right outcomes in this November election that we'll be able to do some things at the national level. No Child Left Behind, as you know, is I think most people understand needs some major revisions.

Can I make a quick comment about the question you asked just a moment ago about public school choice and transportation? Public school choice does not have to be limited just the geographic choice, school A versus school B. You can have multiple choices on a single campus and we see that more and more.

I think what parents want are high quality choices for their sons and daughters, but they would prefer to have it in their neighborhoods, in their communities. They don't want

their kids traveling long distances for all kinds of reasons. So, we have to keep that in mind, I think, when it comes to transportation.

R.T. RYBAK: It's a great question. I'm a mayor at a local level who I got elected right at the time of 9/11 when the federal government and the state government went into huge financial issues. And what we like to say at the local level is the buck doesn't stop here but the responsibility does. And so, it wound up a lot of things have been solved in this country at a very local level on these past few years when the federal government has increasingly abdicated its role. Fine, fair enough, but the funding needs to come with it.

I look for a more activist government that looks for an ability to solve problems. I believe passionately in government. And we're paying enough for it we may as we'll be getting something in return. The federal government needs to be unhooked for the fact that we are becoming an extraordinarily obese country rapidly in a way that is literally a life and death issue for many people in this country. That's not a small issue.

Go back to that point I made about funding streams, I truly believe that this can be done if the federal government takes the many, many places that dollars flow and says, we want an outcome, we want a measure and fund but those two are going to be tied together an aggressive obesity program, local units

of government, you have an option on how to do that, but pick five from this category.

If you want to see sort of how this is being done, we're doing it in Minneapolis on youth violence prevention. We've launched a city-wide initiative with 34 action items those are all tied about 200 outcomes. Mayor Rybak, that you asked, you can look at how we're doing that, but now I brought that to the Conference of Mayors and said, let's do a national agenda. So a mayor who just comes into office and knows they have that problem can grab it off the shelf and do it and there's federal money flowing to it. I think that's the way to do it.

I would just finish though by saying, you're a pediatrician, right? Let's think a little bit about that partnership model I mentioned as well. I remember so clearly when my wife and I pulled away from a hospital with our newborn son, up to that point, I have tremendous training as a dad, okay. They do all these things, let's get real, my responsibility was not the same as my wife but they made you think in the class and the breathing and coaching and breathing and so I felt very, very empowered. So, we get my wonderful son in the backseat and pulled away and my wife and I looked at each other and we're, oh, shit. [Laughter]

You know, we spend so much time on the birthing process, you're there, nurse are there a lot of people are

there, what happens when you get home? Not a person, nothing in that system or anyone talked to us about the things we're talking about now. So, therefore, we go off and do all of that.

Just as schools are attached on and were asking them their responsibility for all of these things, so too is the healthcare system where there are phenomenal people who get the consequences. I would love to during those down periods of time when we were just helping my wife recover and bonding with our kid but there were some way that we could begin to get out that issue of what we were going to feed. I think we'd all have to take responsibility for this doing.

SALLY SQUIRES: We have another question over here and we'll get that microphone to you in just one second.

MALE SPEAKER: May I begin without the microphone?

SALLY SQUIRES: Sure.

R.T. RYBAK: I think you can. [Laughter]

MALE SPEAKER: Thank you. I think the last comment you made is really the leverage point that we need as a country, as a society. I'm not here to pontificate, I'm a cardiologist. And frankly I'm wearing two hats these days because I started a company called Connecticut Weight & Wellness in New Haven and I just came from— I wish that I was here at the outset of this discussion but I just came from ConnectiCare's breakfast on

universal health insurance and I just couldn't get across town fast enough.

But to me, I'm here, my first time as a conventioner, and I couldn't be happier to interact with politicians and government officials on all levels but what I noticed that is conspicuously lacking is a medical physician on at least some of the panels and the speakers for healthcare reform. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. That's why I'm apologizing.

I can say to you what frustrates me more than ever is it was an initiative, it might have been in Tom Huckabee state where the schools sent home a report on BMI for children automatically.

And that failed by the wayside because the parents, believe it or not, the parents were insulted. They were offended when they got a report showing that their child was in fact overweight. So, on the one hand, the challenge is to legislate something that is very similar to a report that would come home that your child has diabetes, or your child is hard to hear in the left ear or your child has a heart murmur. You don't argue with that. You're not offended, what you do I you take that kid to the doctor and you start a health process.

So, I believe that the discussion, the dialogue needs to be between the American Medical Association and all of our federal and state mandated political associations where it starts. We can't leave it up as choice, as a judgmental

discussion. Obesity has not yet been embraced by the medical profession as a bona fide chronic recurring illness. And only when the American Medical Association, the Juvenile Diabetes Association, all of our healthcare industry embraces that, then I think you have some tools to work with to legislate how we can really make roads into that. Thanks.

SALLY SQUIRES: And with that final comment, we're going to wrap up this particular panel but we have another panel coming up and I want to thank both of our panel members here today, Mayor Rybak and Superintendent Rex and, of course, congressman Conyers for being with us. And we have, coming up a panel that is on Obama for President, DNC panel and we will have Melody Barnes who is the Director of Policy for Obama for President and Karen Kornbluh who is the DNC Platform Committee. So, as we make this shift, I hope you'll all just stay with us for a moment and thank you again very much for your time.

[Applause]

[END RECORDING]