

*Remarks of FCC Commissioner
Deborah Taylor Tate
At the Announcement of a
Task Force on Media and Childhood Obesity: Today and Tomorrow*

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Two weeks ago, along with many of you, I attended the Institute of Medicine's unveiling of its most recent report on the progress in addressing childhood obesity in America. First on the list was leadership. Specifically, developing leadership in government, industry, communities, schools, and families in mobilizing the resources required to address childhood obesity. Therefore, I am honored to be standing here today with two outstanding leaders at our government's highest level and I thank Senator Brownback and Chairman Martin for taking that recommendation to heart and organizing this forum and Task Force.

I also want to thank Patti, Susan, Lanier and Tim for your participation today and for all you do for children and families everyday. We also ask all of you, across the United States, who are working on this issue to let us know what you are doing, what has been successful, and what else can be done.

My own Senator, Majority Leader Frist, has shown great leadership on this issue with his bipartisan bills – the Improved Nutrition and Physical Activity Act (IMPACT Act) and the Childhood Obesity Reduction Act. Both seek to facilitate community based efforts to reduce and prevent obesity, train providers and make tools available to those who want to implement successful programs. He has also asked the GAO to study how childhood activity levels have changed over the last several years. And, certainly, other federal agencies are looking at childhood obesity through many different lenses – the Department of Agriculture, the WIC program targeting new moms, the Federal Trade Commission, through their CARU, the advertising industry's self regulatory unit, and the Department of Education, HHS, CDC involvement, to name just a few.

However, the federal government cannot and should not be solely responsible for finding a cure. Parents cannot do it alone. Pediatricians, teachers, food companies and the media cannot do it alone. Like I have said many times before, borrowing from "It takes a village," ***it will take an entire society to solve this epidemic.***

Guess who almost 80 percent of our children report that they learn their eating habits good or bad from? Mom. So, as a mother of three, let me talk to all

the mothers out there. You are the most important part of this equation, in getting your little ones off to a healthy start and embarking upon a healthy, active lifestyle. Remember the old adage, “Do as I say not as I do?” Well, our children watch how we eat, what we eat, and how much we exercise.

But I do not want to focus on the negative today. One of my favorite Tennessean authors, the late Alex Haley, used to say, “Find the good and praise it.” Well, I want to praise some of the efforts that a broad spectrum of folks have already taken to begin addressing the childhood obesity problem.

Community grass roots organizations and other institutions have long been engaged in this issue. In my hometown, Vanderbilt medical students envisioned a program called GirlForce that targets preteen and teenage girls and encourages exercise and good nutrition.

And there are hundreds of local programs all over America:

- Nonprofits from the YMCA (located within 3 miles of 72 million households) to The Junior League’s “Kids in the Kitchen,” have made childhood obesity a national priority.
- Initiatives like Nickelodeon’s “Let’s Just Play” encourages kids to go out and play by actually “going dark” for 3 hours on their Worldwide Day of Play.
- Disney’s “Healthy Kids Initiative” introduces healthy living and eating themes through a variety of characters as part of their storyline.
- Food companies like PepsiCo are engaged in similar outreach and education campaigns, and they are also recognizing the benefits of packaging food for children in smaller, healthier portions –like those cute little 100 calorie packs.
- This week, the American Advertising Federation announced a partnership with PE4life – a group that promotes the benefits of physical education programs in schools.

Since I am fairly new to Washington, D.C., I want to speak directly to our friends in the media and advertising sectors, and those in the food and beverage, grocers and restaurant industry, some of whom are here today. You know the statistics - we all recognize the problem. This is not about blame, this is about solutions. My entire career in Tennessee has been working with your counterparts as “partners” on important public policy issues like raising childhood immunization rates, alerting consumers of scams, or statewide environmental programs. I actually may be one of the few government officials to have won a coveted “Addy.” So, we reach out for your expertise, for your help and ideas

about how best to have the biggest bang for our buck, to educate families and in the end to reduce childhood obesity.

Childhood obesity is a critical public health challenge guaranteed to grow if a major effort is not put forth by all of us - parents, industry, and government - to combat the epidemic. Today's effort is only the beginning in combating such a large national problem. We, at the FCC, continue to review the problem through our own lens to determine how to make media a positive force in the lives of our youth.

In my role as Commissioner, I have been given an incredible opportunity and am honored to serve as a voice for parents. It is a role I take very seriously since I am not only a Commissioner, *but also a mother*. We are not here to fight the influence of media on our children, but to make it a positive force.