

**Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate at Vanderbilt Childhood
Obesity Forum
October 15, 2008 10:30 am**

Two years ago, I attended the release of the Institute of Medicine's report on childhood obesity in Washington, D.C. which found that one-third of America's children are obese or at risk of becoming obese. I was stunned. One of the key recommendations in the IOM Report calls for leadership at all levels—federal, state, and local.

If there was any other health condition or a disease recently discovered that affected ten million American children, we would all be demanding action—immediately---especially if it was a disease that we already have a cure for! The IOM Report also found this may be the first generation of children who will not outlive their parents. For me, this was truly a call to action.

It's a rare but truly exciting day when leaders from various agencies and branches of government can agree 100% on any policy issue. Thus, I was pleased to participate in the formation of the Joint Task Force on Childhood Obesity, chaired by Mr. Gary Knell, CEO of Sesame Street, along with Two U.S. Senators, Senator Brownback and Senator Harkin, joined by my colleagues Chairman Martin and Commissioner Copps. The Task Force- for the first time- brought together a cross-section of leaders in the media, advertising, food and beverage, and child

advocacy industries to develop real-world solutions, including limiting the use of licensed characters in ads for unhealthy foods, and in some cases banning ads for unhealthy foods altogether. Along with the CBBB's Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, we pushed to reduce the number and type of ads for unhealthy foods that target our children. And it worked! Fifteen of the nation's largest food and beverage companies-- representing more than two-thirds of children's food and beverage television advertising-- have pledged to limit or completely ban advertisements for unhealthy foods targeting children. Many of these companies are working to reduce the sugar content of their foods and to develop more multi-grain, low-calorie products; Kellogg is even studying molecular changes to soybeans.

Another piece of good news came in July, when the CBBB issued its first report on the success of these pledges. The report found that "The first six months of the program's operation have shown that the industry participants are dedicated to honoring their pledge obligations and helping to achieve the balance in child-directed food and beverage advertising that is the program's goal."

In addition to the food companies, you will hear very shortly from a number of media companies that have taken great steps in the fight against childhood obesity. Companies like Sesame Street, Disney, Discovery Kids, Nickelodeon, and The Cartoon Network, have agreed to ban the use of their characters in ads for

unhealthy foods. As a mom, I know how hard it is to compete with Elmo or Cinderella. These companies are true industry leaders, and I am grateful for their early adoption of these initiatives. Since we are in Nashville, I want to be sure to recognize the work of Ion Media and Veggie Tales, who have actually pledged to totally ban all ads for unhealthy foods. Their commitment to our children's health is truly revolutionary.

Civic and community groups are also getting involved. Just this week, the Junior League's Kids in the Kitchen campaign was honored with the prestigious Summit Award – the American Society of Association Executives' highest honor for associations that implement innovative community-based programs. Likewise, each spring more than 1400 YMCA's host Healthy Kids Day, where they reach millions of children with positive messages about wholesome foods and active lifestyles.

Why are these initiatives so important?

Marketing to children is an \$11 billion industry. The FTC estimates that the 44 major food and beverage marketers spent \$1.6 billion to promote their products to children and adolescents. For cereals alone, food companies spend about \$237 million, of which the vast majority was targeted to children under age 12.

Marketers spend more money on TV ads than any other medium. And our children spend 22-28 hours per week with TV – more than they spend at school or with

their parents. Thus, a reduction in the number of televised ads for unhealthy foods is truly a great step forward.

I want to conclude with a special thanks to Task Force Chairman, Gary Knell, who truly did yeoman's work in bringing together the many diverse voices and interests on the Task Force. Thank you for all that you and Sesame Street have done for our children-- and for children in 120 nations around the world. Thanks to Gary's effective leadership, we have made great progress regarding the food marketed to our children, and the messages they hear and see.

But these are just first steps. Some countries, like the UK, have adopted regulations to ban all advertising to children. Congress has held hearings in Washington. So while we have seen great progress in the U.S., there is still more to be done. I encourage the industry to continue down the self-regulatory path and to develop additional voluntary commitments. Ten million of our children are depending on it. Thank you.