

**Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate  
Forum on Pediatric Obesity: Developing Unique Partnerships to Halt the Epidemic  
September 29, 2008 12:30**

Thank you Dr. Jacobson and Vanderbilt University Medical Center team for your vision and leadership at all levels -- here in our great State of Tennessee -- and, of course, in your role of setting national policy and making an international impact -- specifically regarding research. I remember when President Bush chose Vanderbilt University to unveil his EMR initiative as you were on the forefront of EMR adoption at that early stage. I would like to thank Dr. Barkin, Dr. Gitlin, Dr. Cone, and Dr. Churchwell, and entire Vanderbilt team, for hosting this outstanding event during Child Health Week 2008. When I first called Dr. Barkin several months ago to discuss this idea with her, I knew we were in good hands. Vanderbilt has been at the forefront of the battle to end childhood obesity.

I believe our children are our greatest natural resource, and we must treat them as such. With ten million children obese or at risk of obesity, the time to act is now. No single segment of society is responsible for this problem, and no single segment can solve it. We must all work together -- parents, teachers, doctors, federal, state, and local government, media, advertisers, children's advocates, and the food and beverage industry -- to

determine the best way to end this epidemic, and ensure the next generation outlives their parents.

Let me share with you a few of the statistics that led me to take on this fight. Some you may have heard before, but I believe they bear repeating.

- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- 300,000 deaths each year in the United States are associated with obesity.
- Obesity is second only to smoking as the leading cause of preventable death.

This epidemic is truly life and death, and it calls on all of us to provide leadership in our respective sectors. Earlier today we heard from a number of medical experts about the science behind obesity and its root causes. We also heard from representatives of the media industry regarding their efforts to curb the use of licensed characters in ads for unhealthy foods. We will hear from the food and beverage industry about their pledges regarding healthier foods. These are areas we must continue to pursue. This is not the end – this is only the beginning. Perhaps the most important battleground, however, remains a child's home. One-third of children have a television in their bedroom. On average, children spend **25 hours a week** watching TV! Compare that to the 30 hours spent in school or the *meager*

*17 hours spent with their parents!* Imagine the results if adolescents spent just half that much time engaging in physical activity! Parents are the first line of defense when it comes to threats to their children's health and well-being. So I call on parents and caregivers and all those who work with our children -- we must be examples of healthy eating and active lifestyles.

This is a battleground state – not with regard to the Presidential election – but because Tennessee has taken on this enemy and I am proud of my State and its leaders, Governor Phil Bredesen and Commissioner Susan Cooper.

Finally, I want to thank those of you that traveled from all across the country to be here today. Your commitment is evidence to me that there are solutions, and that we can eradicate and end this life-threatening childhood disease. Thank you.