

## **Coburn Amendment #421— To amend the reserve fund in the bill relating to assistance for working families to prohibit SNAP funding for junk food.**

Nearly \$75 billion was spent to provide over 46 million Americans with federal financial assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Fiscal Year 2012.<sup>1 2</sup> With so many families struggling financially, this support can ensure many children who otherwise might go to bed hungry have healthy meals.

### **However, many purchases made with SNAP funds provide little to no nutritional assistance to the beneficiaries.**

While the program was recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, there is no requirement for the food purchased to be nutritious. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), “soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, and ice cream are food items and are therefore eligible items.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, “energy drinks that have a nutrition facts label are eligible foods,” even if they have little nutritional value.<sup>4</sup>

More than \$2 billion of beverages sweetened with sugar are purchased with food stamps every year, according to a study by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. “Fifty-eight percent of all refreshment beverages purchased by SNAP participants were for sugar-sweetened beverages,” such as soda pop and sports drinks.<sup>5</sup>

A significant portion of low-income Americans struggle with obesity, diabetes, and other health issues that result from an unhealthy diet, yet the principle federal program aimed at providing nutrition to that demographic lacks the necessary controls to ensure a positive outcome. In fact, SNAP may actually be exacerbating the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Rosiak, “Top secret: \$80B a year for food stamps, but feds won’t reveal what’s purchased,” The Washington Times, June 24, 2012; <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jun/24/top-secret-what-food-stamps-buy/?page=all>.

<sup>2</sup> “SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: NUMBER OF PERSONS PARTICIPATING,” U.S. Department of Agriculture website, data as of March 8, 2013, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/29snapcurrpp.htm>, accessed March 21, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Eligible Food Items,” US Department of Agriculture website, modified February 16, 2012, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers/eligible.htm>, accessed March 21, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> “Federal food program pays billions for sugar-sweetened beverages,” Yale University website, September 17, 2012, <http://news.yale.edu/2012/09/17/federal-food-program-pays-billions-sugar-sweetened-beverages>, accessed March 21, 2012.

According to a state-wide study in California, participants in SNAP are 30 percent more likely to be obese, controlling for income levels, compared with non-participants.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the USDA has found that SNAP participants consume a significantly higher caloric intake from added sugars than non-participants.<sup>7</sup> The possibility that SNAP is contributing to some Americans' health issues is absolutely unacceptable.

### **The solution is simple: prohibit SNAP funding of junk food.**

This amendment would limit SNAP purchases to food and drink products that actually provide a nutritional benefit, a common-sense fix. No longer would SNAP funds go to, as a recent news story found, the purchase of "Cheetos Puffs, a one-ounce handful of which contains 10 grams of fat...two dozen 12-ounce cans of Fanta Orange soda, each of which contains 44 grams of sugar... [and] a carton of six-ounce Capri Sun drink pouches, each of which contains 16 grams of sugar."<sup>8</sup>

Junk food such as the items profiled above has little to no nutritional value, and in large amounts can contribute to obesity and other health issues. Although Americans are free to purchase these (often tasty) items, federal funding aimed specifically at supplementing nutritional food purchases should not go towards those purchases.

The amount of federal funding provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in 2012 was nearly triple the 2003 level. During these difficult economic times, more and more low-income Americans are relying on the program for sustenance each year. It is increasingly important, therefore, that the program have a net positive benefit on its recipients; prohibiting junk food purchases is a straightforward reform that will help achieve this goal.

This amendment is a common-sense policy modification to a program that provides for nearly 46 million Americans, and the Senate should adopt it immediately.

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<sup>6</sup> Leung CW, Cillamor E. "Is participation in food and income assistance programmes associated with obesity in California adults? Results from a state-wide survey." *Public Health Nutr.* 2010; 14:645-652.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research, Nutrition and Analysis, "Diet Quality of Americans by Food Stamp Participation Status: Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey," 1999-2004, by Nancy Cole and Mary Kay Fox. Project Officer: Jenny Laster Genser, Alexandria, VA: 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Lane, "Why should food stamps pay for junk food?," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2013; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-lane-why-should-food-stamps-pay-for-junk-food/2013/03/18/af2f4a40-8fff-11e2-9cfd-36d6c9b5d7ad\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-lane-why-should-food-stamps-pay-for-junk-food/2013/03/18/af2f4a40-8fff-11e2-9cfd-36d6c9b5d7ad_story.html).