

REMARKS BY SAM KASS
WHITE HOUSE ASSISTANT CHEF and
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR ON HEALTHY FOOD INITIATIVES
AT THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION CONFERENCE

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Thank you, Cynthia, for that kind introduction. Before I begin, I want to take a moment to acknowledge Bill Dietz, who is retiring from Federal service in a few short weeks. Bill, you have done so much to advance the science and build our knowledge of the causes and solutions to obesity. We are forever indebted to you.

On behalf of the President and First Lady, I want to thank everyone in this room for the work they do. Long before these issues were front page news, you all were in the trenches sounding the alarm and taking action. Our collective progress is a result of the foundation that you all have built over the years, and we are so grateful for your service to this country.

We recently celebrated the second anniversary of *Let's Move!* and kicked off the festivities in a stadium in Iowa, where 14,000 kids cheered and danced along with the First Lady. Fourteen thousand kids! We heard touching personal stories from many of them about how *Let's Move!* has changed their lives, how they're eating wholesome foods, and how they're having fun moving! The whole state of Iowa has launched an effort to be the healthiest state in the U.S. Republican Governor Brandsted declared the day "*Let's Move! Day*" and danced alongside the First Lady and those kids. They even had a giant "cake" that was 20 feet tall and made solely of fruit to celebrate the anniversary. The energy of the kids gave me chills, and it was a sight I will never forget.

That moment took me back to Chicago, when the First Lady was Michelle Obama. She was tirelessly raising her children, working at a hospital, and supporting her husband, who had just announced he was running for President. In the midst of it all, she was confronted with the fact that her kids were showing signs of potential health problems if she didn't make some changes to their diets. Although she always tried to do right by her kids, the realization that her kids' health was being undermined awoke her to the situation families across the country were facing. The First Lady started making small changes and they made a big difference to improve her daughters' health.

Back in their home in Chicago, she and I often discussed the barriers and challenges families faced to be healthy. We explored the range of strategies and approaches we could take to support families and help get the country on a better track. She decided that if she ever had the privilege of being the First Lady, her first step would be planting a vegetable garden on the South Lawn. If that was successful, then we would develop a national initiative to tackle the problem and unite the country around the health and wellbeing of our children. At the time, the President was way down in the polls, so this seemed like a distant possibility. Nonetheless, we were excited to discuss ways to help our children become healthier.

Fortunately, we had the opportunity to plant that garden. And we did it because we understood the potential symbolic power it held. We knew this would be the most effective way to showcase fruits and vegetables, cooking, and eating healthy in a way that engaged kids and made it fun. Although I knew the response was going to be immense, I was floored by the magnitude of the country's reaction. We knew that the time was right to take this work to the next level, and out of the garden grew *Let's Move!*

The event in Iowa and the three day anniversary tour gave me a moment of reflection. The energy of those 14,000 kids dancing and cheering for fruits and

vegetables reminded me just how far we had come, from the conversations around the kitchen table in Chicago, to the first plants we put in the ground, to all we as a Nation have accomplished over the past couple of years. It is simply breathtaking.

Yet, I am amused by people who still, at times, characterize childhood obesity as a safe issue for the First Lady of the United States to take on. I can't help but chuckle when she's asked about it or when I read it in articles. And I know that all of you who have worked on this issue for decades know just how entrenched, how complicated, and how challenging this issue is.

She did not pick this issue because it was perceived as "safe." We knew that setting such an ambitious long term goal had tremendous risks. She took on an issue with a goal that spans across a generation of kids. She has, I have, and we all have dedicated the rest of our lives to improve the health and wellbeing of the next generation. This is our life's work. The First Lady is dedicating her time and passion at the White House to this issue because it means most to her as a mother and as an American.

We knew she would be critiqued and criticized. And we have been -- even at times by people who are working toward the same goal. But we embrace that critique because we know that it comes with taking on a serious issue with serious strategies to meet the challenge. And no one ever said this was going to be easy.

What motivates us is not just the fact that one in three Americans will have diabetes, the impact of obesity on the economy and our healthcare system, or our kids' compromised ability to learn. It's not just the fact that obesity may be our Nation's greatest national security threat. All of those reasons are of vital importance, but we have also internalized what these problems really mean in the lives of children. The First Lady always reminds us that this is about how our

kids feel and about how they feel about themselves. It's about the toll that being overweight takes on their self-esteem and their ability to perform.

One of the many things I admire about her is how relentlessly forward-thinking she is. She doesn't get caught up in the day to day controversies or criticism. She cares about impact. In every meeting, the focus is on substance, impact, and sustaining the strategies and collaborations we are forging. And over the past two years, we have made some real headway.

We have worked to lead by example. We have overhauled Federal Government food procurement policies to include more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables and less sodium and fat. We have worked closely with the Department of Defense, who announced dramatic improvements to the nutrition standards for the 4.65 billion dollars' worth of food that they purchase every year. This is the first increase in the standard in 20 years.

And the First Lady, along with the President, championed the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, which will transform the school food environment. The act is giving schools more money and more resources than ever before. And for the first time in the history of the school nutrition programs, there will be standards for all food sold in schools—for the vending machines, snack bars, etc. With kids often consuming the majority of their calories in schools, kids learn from lunch, and their taste preferences are shaped in that environment. Having delicious, healthy food in school is critical to getting our kids on the right path.

We have also worked with the Partnership for a Healthier America to galvanize the private sector to join us. They, of course, supply our food.

Darden Restaurants, who serves four hundred million meals per year, pledged to make a fruit or vegetable and low fat milk the default options for all kids' menus and to reduce calories and sodium by 20 percent over 10 years

across their entire menu.

Walmart committed to reducing the cost of fruits and vegetables by one billion dollars last year, which they successfully achieved. They pledged to reduce sodium by 25 percent and sugars by 10 percent in all products across key categories, not just their own brand, which will affect products throughout the marketplace, not just at WalMart. And they are working to reduce the cost of healthier options like whole wheat bread and whole wheat pasta, which often cost more because a health-conscious consumer will pay a little more. That's not right.

Along with these big announcements, we have also done fun things to build positive energy around these issues.

Last year, Beyonce made the *Let's Move!* flash workout for us, garnering over 19.3 million views on YouTube.

More than 300,000 young people helped the First Lady set the Guinness World Record for Jumping Jacks.

And there are Mrs. Obama's many TV appearances, which have brought the message of the campaign to millions more people. There's nothing quite like seeing our elegant First Lady racing through the halls of the White House with Jimmy Fallon, getting Jay Leno to eat his vegetables, working out with the Biggest Loser contestants, or doing a pushup contest with Ellen. Which, of course, she won.

We are working to bring all of our collective work to where the American people are.

So this national conversation—this national movement—must continue.

This is literally life and death we are talking about.

I know that the need to bring healthy, affordable food into every community is real. We have studied the science and have seen it in our own eyes, from Philadelphia to Chicago to California. That's why we've been thrilled at the commitments from the private sector.

Last July, several of the Nation's food retailers committed to build or expand 1,500 grocery stores, impacting over nine million Americans who live in communities across America with little or no access to healthy food.

Our Federal agencies also continue to advance the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. While Congress did not directly fund the President's budget request in FY 2011, we worked creatively to leverage existing resources which included \$25 million in grants to CDFIs to fund healthy food initiatives. The Treasury New Market Tax Credits program prioritized this issue and is expected to generate over \$400 million for food access activities.

And today I am thrilled to announce that USDA will be releasing \$4 million to states to help farmers markets become EBT accessible. This will increase lower income families' ability to purchase healthier food nationwide.

But making healthier food affordable and available is just one component of the solution. A comprehensive approach is needed -- simply building a grocery store in a community that needs it isn't going to solve the problem on its own.

Beyond our work to improve the food landscape, we need to empower families with information to make the best choices. That's one reason why we "reformulated" the Food Pyramid. The First Lady insisted that as an administration we produce easy to understand and actionable tools to help support families who are trying to make better choices. MyPlate does just that.

For the first time, the Federal government under her leadership established seven simple tips, like “fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables,” “choose water over sugary drinks,” and “enjoy your food but eat less.”

And we are continuing this work. I am also thrilled at this morning’s announcement by Bird’s Eye. Their commitment over the next three years to invest in inspiring kids to eat more vegetables, to bring new, kid-oriented products to market, and to reduce the cost of vegetables is yet another fantastic step towards our goal. I would like to recognize Sally Robling for her leadership. We look forward to working with you in the years to come.

All of that is to say, we are just getting started. We are now in year three of *Let’s Move!*. We are looking to build on this foundation, work to get the changes we have secured on the ground where families can access them, and continue to advocate for even greater change. In the coming months, we are working on galvanizing the Nation around physical activity. From day one, we’ve always said our kids need to be both eating right and getting active. I know some are worried that a focus on physical activity will come at the expense of nutrition, and there is concern we are abandoning our efforts around food. I want to assure everyone that is simply not the case; we remain as committed as ever to pulling every lever we have to improve nutrition for American children.

But the need to get our children moving is real. The average American child spends 7.5 hours in front of a screen every day. Experts warn we are raising the most sedentary generation in American history. Currently only four percent of lower schools, eight percent of middle schools, and two percent of high schools offer daily PE. We know we need to get PE back in schools and reintegrate activity throughout the day. We’ve been thrilled at the commitments from celebrity sports stars and professional sports associations. And that over 1.7 million people completed the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award. We will continue to drive toward more major announcements in the months to come.

But like the other areas of focus, physical fitness is just one more step.

At times the current discourse about how to solve this problem forgets a core truth: there is no one-size-fits-all solution to an incredibly complicated problem that has been decades in the making. The First Lady often says that while government certainly has a role to play, most of the solutions are going to come from communities and leaders across this country. The solutions to these challenges are deeper than a piece of legislation or a policy position. Indeed, we will only be successful when we can foster a new norm, where living an active lifestyle and eating healthy are our core values.

Because of the success in changing norms around tobacco use, many experts often compare it to obesity prevention. While both are critical public health issues, ending childhood obesity is not like eradicating smoking. The policy interventions that were used to reduce tobacco use, which rested on demonizing smoking, don't make sense when it comes to obesity or food. You don't have to smoke to live, but you do have to eat to live.

Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are, said one of the great thought leaders of food. Food is about far more than mere sustenance. Food is our very identity. It is how we honor family -- it is how we remember home. It is how we understand each other, and it is how we show love.

Efforts to demonize food, or reduce the problem to one issue, miss the underlying truth about food and diminish our ability to produce permanent, comprehensive change.

The *Let's Move!* initiative has been designed to empower the country and allow for individuals and groups to utilize our tools in a way that is most effective for them. The different layers of strategies and outreach platforms are woven

together for a common purpose but have flexibility to work at every level. Sub-initiatives are galvanizing faith leaders and childcare centers to serve healthier food; mayors are working to improve access to play; and doctors are writing formal prescriptions for fruit and vegetable consumption as well as physical activity. Museums and gardens are using their programs to teach kids about health, and chefs are working in schools to improve the food served in cafeterias. And this is just to name a few. All of these efforts have thousands of people committed to working on the local level to make this change real for families.

But because of all of our collective efforts, today, the country is demanding more support than we are supplying across the board. I read stats all the time like the fact that American Gardening Association gave about 380 grants for community gardens but had over 10,000 applications.

And 625,500 kids are now enjoying healthy fresh produce everyday at school, thanks to *Let's Move!* Salad Bars to Schools, which has placed 1,251 kid-sized salad bars in schools across the US. But we've got more than one thousand schools waiting for salad bars, as the money gets raised to fund these.

We have to step up our efforts.

Once upon a time, the American dream included the idea that kids would do better than their parents. They'd be more educated, they'd earn a higher income, and they'd be more successful. But today, our youngest generation could be the children that not only don't achieve the American dream but also might actually live shorter lives than their parents.

It's not too late to secure the American Dream for the next generation, That's what *Let's Move!* is.

So I want to thank you for your leadership and commitment to the families

of this country. Your tireless work is making a tremendous impact in people's lives. This is a moment that won't come around again for a long time. We are on the cusp of massive change, and the time is now. Everyone who cares about the future of this country must then care about the health and wellbeing of our Nation's kids. That means we have an opportunity to broaden our coalitions and leverage our collective voice. If we do this, I truly believe we will all be able to look back upon this time and reflect how this country united around children and once again created the conditions for the next generation to reach their full potential and live the vibrant lives we know they deserve.

I am convinced we can get there when I see all the small changes that are happening across this country. From the school chef who has taken it upon herself to start cooking healthier options out of her under-equipped, basement kitchen, to the community leader who is organizing parents to reclaim a neighborhood park so kids have a space to play, or the 11-year-old like Hailey Thomas who started a cooking show out of her mom's kitchen and a healthy girl adventure club to get her peers more active. I know we can get there when I read the letters that the First Lady gets on a weekly basis, like this one:

My name is Samantha and I am 15 years old. I know how you have been working to make America a healthier place, well I am too. I recently weighed a total of 193lbs which made me feel horrible and ask myself, how did I let myself get to this point. Whenever i would wake up and look in the mirror, i hated what i saw. A few years ago i was diagnosed with asthma and was told that if I didn't watch my sugar, i was at risk for diabetes. I didn't listen, went on my way and gained weight. I didn't think anything of it. When i reached that point of being 7lbs away from being 200lbs in my teens, it was a wakeup call. During the October of 2010, i finally took the opportunity to lose the weight. I consulted my health teacher at my high school and she agreed to help me. So thru those 9 months, i started watching what i ate and the portion sizes. This helped

the most because now I don't eat anything without checking the calories and sugars of the things I eat in packages. Then for exercise, I was on the softball team and went to a cardio club held afterschool. I finally started seeing a difference and built my self-confidence. I went from being a size 16 in pants to now being a size 4-2 and weigh 126lbs. There is such a big difference in the way I look that people have asked me to help them lose weight, which I have. I am writing you this letter to help me fight childhood obesity. Help me help the young adults be healthier, live a longer life and lower the percentage of kids that are obese in America. They shouldn't get used to not being able to do what they want and follow where their dreams take them. Please consider the idea and please write me back.

It's letters like these that come to the White House that inspire me. They inspire me not only to help kids who are currently struggling, but most important to prevent future children from ever being in this situation to begin with. These kinds of amazing moments are happening all over the country every single day, and we will continue to do everything we can to make a difference. The future of this Nation depends on it. Thank you.
