

President Bill Clinton Addresses the National Governors Association About the Obesity Crisis in the United States

Highlights Work of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation

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President Bill Clinton delivered the closing address at the National Governors Association's Winter Meeting today. During his remarks, President Clinton urged America's governors to take an active role in preventing childhood obesity, while warning of the serious dangers of not addressing this rising epidemic, including skyrocketing healthcare costs. He also discussed his Foundation's work on the issue with the American Heart Association and expressed his hope that governors would work with his Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

"Nine million children and adolescents are overweight today," said President Clinton. "These children have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. Not only does this pose a great health risk, but it also carries economic consequences, as obesity-related healthcare costs for young people continue to rise and show no sign of declining. We must act now to stop and reverse this deadly trend. If we do not, today's generation of young people could be the first generation of Americans to have shorter life expectancies than their parents."

"Four million obese children are Medicaid beneficiaries. Obesity-related hospital costs for children and youth have tripled over the past two decades, from \$35 million in 1981 to \$127 million in 1999. a 2004 Emory University study found that rising obesity rates alone accounted for 27% of the growth in health spending between 1987—2001."

President Clinton also cited a recent study published in Health Affairs which found that the United States will spend more than \$4 trillion on health care by 2015, with the government splitting the costs with consumers. If this trend persists, national health care spending will outpace the projected average annual GDP growth by 2.1 percent over the next ten years.

In May of 2005, the Clinton Foundation joined forces with the American Heart Association to create the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a partnership dedicated to addressing the public health threat of childhood obesity. Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee serves as a co-chair of the Alliance, and has dedicated his term as NGA Chairman to the Healthy America Initiative to examine ways in which governors and policymakers can better collaborate with the public and private sector to promote healthy living programs and support prevention and wellness-related state policies.

"Childhood obesity is something we can reverse," Clinton concluded. "My Foundation, along with Governor Huckabee and the American Heart Association, is working hard on this issue and I am confident that with your help, we will succeed in creating a healthier generation of Americans."

"To achieve our goals, we are creating a national recognition program shining a spotlight on schools who have taken concrete and innovative steps to create healthier learning environments for children and healthier work environments for their staff," Clinton explained about the Alliance's Healthy Schools Initiative. "Schools will be evaluated based on four criteria: improving the nutritional value of food served in and out of cafeterias; increasing access to physical activity during the school day and after school; implementing curricula on healthy living; and providing staff wellness programs. The schools will be able to achieve bronze, silver and gold level recognition, with especially innovative schools receiving exemplary recognition."



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The Alliance will also negotiate deals with industry leaders to provide packages of healthy menu items at a price point schools can afford. Currently, one in six school districts have outsourced their cafeterias to full-service caterers that charge a premium for healthier offerings. The Alliance also plans to work to create buying clubs, so schools can come together and get more purchasing power and better deals. Finally, the Alliance will negotiate with snack and beverage companies to improve the nutritional content of vending machines and make healthier vending machines economically viable for both schools and companies.