

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on Signing the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

December 13, 2010

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please, please have a seat. Good morning, everybody.

Audience members. Good morning.

The President. Well, I want to thank all the students and faculty and staff here at Tubman Elementary for hosting us today at your beautiful school. And we want to thank Principal Harry Hughes for doing outstanding work here. Thank you. Give them all a big round of applause.

We are thrilled to be here with all of you as I sign the healthy, hungry-free kids act, a bill that's vitally important to the health and welfare of our kids and to our country. But before I do this, I just want to acknowledge a few of the folks who are here, as well as a few who are not here but who played a hugely important role in getting this legislation passed.

On the stage we have Madam Speaker, Nancy Pelosi; two outstanding Senators, Blanche Lincoln and Tom Harkin, who worked so hard to get this done; Members of the House of Representatives Miller, DeLauro, and Platts, who all worked so hard to make this happen—we're grateful to you; and three of my outstanding members of my Cabinet who worked tirelessly on this issue, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack—it happens to be his birthday today, happy birthday—Secretary Arne Duncan, our great Secretary of Education, and Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of Health and Human Services.

Not—they couldn't be here today but they played a huge role in making this happen: Senator Harry Reid, the majority leader in the Senate; Senator Mike [Mitch]* McConnell, the ranking Republican who helped facilitate the smooth passage of this bill; Senator Chambliss, who was the lead Republican; Representatives Hoyer, Clyburn, and McCarthy all played important roles, and so we're very grateful to them. Give them a big round of applause.

It is worth noting that this bill passed with bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress. That hasn't happened as often as we'd like over the last couple of years, but I think it says something about our politics. It reminds us that no matter what people may hear about how divided things are in Washington, we can still come together and agree on issues that matter for our children's future and for our future as a nation. And that's really what today is all about.

At a very basic level, this act is about doing what's right for our children. Right now, across the country, too many kids don't have access to school meals. And often, the food that's being offered isn't as healthy or as nutritious as it should be. That's part of the reason why one in three children in America today are either overweight or obese.

And we're seeing this problem in every part of the country in kids from all different backgrounds and all walks of life. As a result, doctors are now starting to see conditions like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes in children. These are things that they only used to see in adults. And this bill is about reversing that trend and giving our kids the healthy futures that they deserve.

* White House correction.

And this bill is also about doing what's right for our country, because we feel the strains that treating obesity-related health conditions puts on our economy. We've seen the connection between what our kids eat and how well they perform in school. And we know that the countries that succeed in the 21st century will be the ones that have the best prepared, best educated workforce around.

So we need to make sure our kids have the energy and the capacity to go toe to toe with any of their peers, anywhere in the world. And we need to make sure that they're all reaching their potential. That's precisely what this bill, the healthy, hungry-free kids act, will accomplish.

This legislation will help 115,000 children gain access to school meal programs. And wherever we can, we're doing away with bureaucracy and redtape so that families don't have to fill out mountains of paperwork to get their kids the nutrition they need.

We're improving the quality of those meals by reimbursing schools an additional six cents per lunch to help them provide with healthier options—the first real increase, by the way, in over 30 years. Because when our kids walk into the lunchroom, we want to be sure that they're getting balanced, nutritious meals that they need to succeed in the classroom.

We're empowering parents by making information more available about the quality of school meals, helping families understand what their kids are eating during the day. And to support our schools' efforts to serve fresh fruits and vegetables, we're connecting them with local farmers.

We're also improving food safety in schools and boosting the quality of commodities like cheese that schools get from the Department of Agriculture and use in their lunch and breakfast programs.

It's also important to note that while this bill is fully paid for, it won't add a dime to the deficit, some of the funding comes from rolling back a temporary increase in food stamp benefits—or SNAP as it's now called—starting in the fall of 2013. I know a number of Members of Congress have expressed concerns about this offset being included in the bill, and I'm committed to working with them to restore these funds in the future.

We know that every day across this country, parents are working as hard as they can to make healthy choices for their kids. Schools are doing everything possible to provide the nutritious food they need to thrive. Communities are coming together to help our young people lead healthier lives right from the beginning. And it's time that we made that work a little bit easier. So these folks are fulfilling their responsibilities to our kids. This legislation helps ensure that we fulfill our responsibilities as well.

Shortly after signing the first law establishing school lunches, Harry Truman said that "nothing is more important in our national life than the welfare of our children, and proper nourishment comes first in attaining this welfare."

So today, I'm very proud to sign this bill that continues that legacy. Not only am I very proud of the bill, but had I not been able to get this passed, I would be sleeping on the couch.
[Laughter]

So now I am very proud to introduce somebody who's done so much to shine a light on these critical issues related to childhood nutrition and obesity and exercise: America's First Lady, my First Lady, Michelle Obama.

[At this point, the First Lady made brief remarks.]

The President. Let's go sign this bill.

The First Lady. Let's go do it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:33 a.m. at Harriet Tubman Elementary School. S. 3307, approved December 13, was assigned Public Law No. 111–296. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

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Names: Chambliss, Saxby; Clyburn, James E.; DeLauro, Rosa L.; Duncan, Arne; Harkin, Thomas R.; Hoyer, Steny H.; Hughes, Harry; Lincoln, Blanche Lambert; McCarthy, Carolyn; McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Miller, George; Obama, Michelle; Pelosi, Nancy; Platts, Todd; Reid, Harry; Sebelius, Kathleen; Vilsack, Thomas J.

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