CCF Refutes IOM Strategy to Reduce Consumer Choices

Washington, DC – Today the nonprofit Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF) is refuting the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) new report, "Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation," which misguidedly calls for the government and industry decision-makers to actively reduce the number of choices Americans have when they sit down to eat.

The IOM report proposes to improve the food environment by taxing sugar-sweetened beverages, creating restaurant zoning laws, and giving breaks to those building grocery stores in "food deserts." Yet, in a recent study of America's food environment conducted by Drs. Charles Baum (Middle Tennessee State University) and Shin-Yi Chou (Lehigh University), environmental factors like food prices and restaurant location were shown to play a minuscule role in America's current obesity rates. The study found a lack of personal responsibility is making Americans overweight. Fundamentally, the key to maintaining a healthy weight is what it always has been: striking a balance between calories taken in (food) and calories expended (exercise).

"The Institute of Medicine and other food nannies are no longer just calling for Americans to reduce their consumption of certain foods," said J. Justin Wilson, CCF's Senior Research Analyst. "They're flatly arguing against consumers having any choice in their snacks and meals. It is arrogant and absurd to suggest that Americans are too stupid to make their own food choices."

The IOM proposal comes as data from the National Center for Health Statistics recently showed obesity rates in the United States to have slowed or possibly even to be leveling off. Many public health zealots and legislators are quick to champion heavy-handed government policies, such as taxing soda and sweets. However, what's working for Americans is what always has, personal responsibility and consumer choice. Restaurants and food companies, meanwhile, have recognized changing consumer tastes by offering more options and smaller-portioned meals and snacks. Companies are responding to consumer demand by expanding their menus, not limiting them to low-sodium crackers and water.

"Increasing consumers' options on menus and store shelves is the real key to curbing obesity," Wilson continued, "not imposing one-size-fits-all policies that completely ignore the importance of personal responsibility."

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