



Students Forced to Lobby for Obama's Anti-Sugary Drink Policies

By: Alexandra Ward – March 8, 2013

A law professor at George Washington University is forcing his students to lobby their state and local governments to adopt policies that support President Barack Obama's mission to fight obesity by banning sugary beverages.

"Some 200 undergrads will be asked to contact legislators in their home cities, counties, or states asking them to adopt legislation similar to that already adopted in New York City – banning restaurants, delis, movie theaters, and many other businesses from selling high-sugar drinks in cups or containers larger than 16 ounces," said professor John Banzhaf in a press release he sent out Monday detailing his objectives.

In his release titled "Undergrads Required to Lobby for Obama Policy," Banzhaf said the ban on sugary drinks would join other items contained in the Obamacare legislation aimed at fighting obesity, including requiring restaurants to disclose calorie counts and zoning restrictions to keep fast food chains away from schools.

The "real-world project" will teach students at GWU in Washington, D.C., that public action can make a difference, Banzhaf said.

Banzhaf has a history of publicity-seeking, litigious behavior, according to Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, an American libertarian think tank.

In the past, Banzhaf has proposed lawsuits against parents of obese children and against doctors who do not adequately warn their patients against obesity; urged that parents who smoke not be allowed to adopt kids; threatened school officials in Massachusetts with lawsuits naming them personally if they allow soft drinks to be sold on school property; and promoted suits against individual administrators at his own institution, GWU.

Students who do not want to campaign for a ban on sugary beverages may instead lobby for a ban on the sale of sugary drinks to children, a ban on the sale of such drinks in vending machines, or a limit on the maximum size of sugary drinks, among other things.

But these "alternatives" are so limited in scope, Olson argued, that there is essentially no room for any deviation from Banzhaf's set agenda.

"All the other examples given, however, involve alternative ways of extending regulation and taxation in the food and beverage realm," Olson wrote. "Because asking the students to lobby on behalf of whatever opinions they themselves actually consider worth lobbying for would just be too old-school. Presumably any student that believes that the government should stay out of [the food and beverage] area has had the foresight to drop

the course."