

AMSPECBLOG

Hold the Presses: Government Paternalism Fails!

By Doug Bandow on 7.7.11 @ 6:03AM

Shocking news. Americans are fat because ... they like eating fatty foods. It turns out that people are not fooled by evil food cartels into believing that triple cheese-burgers have no more calories than a dish of celery. So government-mandated labels--sit down, please, for the astounding news--don't work!

Reports the *Washington Post*.

Like other lunchers at the Cheesecake Factory at White Flint Mall, Johnson saw the calorie counts thanks to a Montgomery County law that went into effect this year mandating that chain restaurants clearly list them. Like many diners, he ignored them.

Evidence is mounting that calorie labels - promoted by some nutritionists and the restaurant industry to help stem the obesity crisis - do not steer most people to lower-calorie foods. Eating habits rarely change, according to several studies. Perversely, some diners see the labels yet consume more calories than usual. People who use the labels often don't need to. (Meaning: They are thin.)

Questions about the effectiveness of calorie disclosure come as the federal government is finalizing regulations to nationalize labeling in chain restaurants next year as part of a measure tucked into President Obama's health-care law. Some chain restaurants are tweaking menus in anticipation, offering more low-calorie meals. Yet several high-cal eateries that operate in Montgomery - including the Cheesecake Factory, Chipotle, Five Guys and Red Robin Gourmet Burgers - report no change in dining habits because of the labels.

Amazing, isn't it!? People eat ice cream and chocolate and french fries and candy and all sorts of other fattening things even though they realize that doing so isn't likely to turn them into svelte fitness gods and goddesses. Telling them exactly how many calories they are consuming doesn't make them want to sacrifice good taste in order to turn into svelt fitness gods and goddesses.

Stupid people. Hard-working and far-sighted politicians and bureaucrats do so much to help the masses, but the latter refuse to be helped. What's a determined paternalist to do? Maybe it is time for government restaurants and supermarkets, a national food police, mandatory early morning exercises, and public health nannies in every neighborhood!

I'm kidding. Really. But don't suggest any of these ideas to President Barack Obama. If your economic policies have failed, your celebrated health care program guarantees busted budgets and government health care rationing, and you've gotten bogged down in another war which is both stupid and illegal, a Federal Calorie Campaign might seem to make sense.

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