

Senate Select Committee on Obesity and Diabetes
“The Governor’s Obesity Prevention Plan: Status of Implementation”
Informational Hearing
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Testimony of:
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Mr. Chair and Members,

My name is Dr. Harold Goldstein. I am the Executive Director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. I was on the original planning committee for the Governor’s Obesity Summit and was Co-Chair of what became known as the Get Healthy California Workgroup along with Secretary Belshe and Safeway’s CEO Steve Burd.

At the start of this process, I was very enthusiastic about my participation because I believed the Governor and leaders of his Administration when they described their commitment to curbing the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. “This wasn’t about talk,” everyone assured us, “this was about action.”

Leading up to the Summit, the Governor developed a bold 10 point vision for a healthier California. I remember the meeting where an early draft of the Vision was first released. It was electric: with the First Lady, Secretary Belshe, Bob Ross from the CA Endowment, and leading advocates from across the state all in agreement. It seemed like a case study of what

could be done when leaders from inside and outside of government work together.

Throughout this process, the Governor and leaders within the Administration would describe how the obesity epidemic required action within all sectors of our society – schools, communities, businesses -- but that state government had a special responsibility to lead by example, to lead by establishing vital public policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity for all Californians.

As planned, the summit was a big splash. The Governor signed legislation to get soda and junk food out of schools, and in 2006 he led efforts to fund PE for the first time. But then the action just stopped.

It's as if this Super Bowl Team scored easily the first two times they got the ball, and then the head coach – the Governor -- walked off the field to do something else and brought most of his coaching staff with him.

Secretary Belshe called only two meetings of the Get Healthy California Work Group, on February 21 and June 22, 2006. 4 committees of the Work Group met outside of the full meetings. The physical activity subgroup that I chaired, for example, met three times. Our policy recommendations and suggestions for additional commitments of significance were included in the 1 Year Anniversary Report about the Summit, but to my knowledge there has been no follow up to carry out those recommendations.

But even MORE disappointing, is that the Administration has stopped leading by example,

- The Governor has sponsored no obesity-related legislation that I know of.
- There has been little if any effort to garner support for other legislation.
- There has been no funding for obesity prevention.
- And many of us were just astounded last year when the Governor even vetoed legislation implementing a key policy included in his own obesity prevention plan.

To the Administration's credit, the Governor's Health Care Reform proposals always included funding for what were called "community makeovers," which presumably would have funded local nutrition and physical activity programs. But the Administration's singular focus on health care reform seems to have distracted them from virtually everything else in the obesity prevention plan.

There is one central lesson of every major public health movement in modern history: and that is that public policies must be in place to support people in making healthy choices. It was true with tobacco, it was true with drunk driving, and it will be true with eating and activity. And for those policies to be put in place, our elected leaders must indeed lead.

A public opinion poll conducted by the Field Research Corporation released just yesterday showed that registered voters now view obesity as the single most important health issue facing California children. More than 2/3 of

both Democrats and Republicans believe that obesity is very serious to children's overall health and well-being. And most importantly, almost 70% of registered voters believe that federal state and local government are doing too little to combat childhood obesity.

MUCH more needs to be done if we are going to stop today's children from being the first in modern history to have shorter life expectancy than their parents. More than "changing the way the Department of Public Health does business," and more than seeking grant funding from the California Endowment or the CDC. What is needed are changes in public policy.

I'm sure I speak for all the advocates here today. We are ready to work with all of you, the Governor, and the Administration to establish policy reforms that are needed to turn this epidemic around, the kind of policy changes that are necessary to implement the Governor's vision, and the kind of policies that are outlined in the Governor's own Obesity Prevention Plan.

This administration has an extraordinary Super Bowl Team – some of their key players are here today. But for them to win the game – and quite frankly, within this bureaucracy, for them to be able to even play the game to the best of their ability -- the head coach and the rest of his coaching staff have to come back to the field and make THIS game, must make healthy eating and physical activity, a top policy priority once again.

Thank you.