

Davis Remarks on National Physical Education and Sport Week

SPEECH OF

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OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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* Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I would like to communicate my support for designating the week of May 2, 2010 as ``National Physical Education and Sport Week." America faces an obesity crisis, and this problem is particularly harmful to our children. The childhood obesity rate has more than tripled since 1980, and today the CDC places the rate at approximately 17%. This crisis, however, does not affect all children equally. It disproportionately affects children from racial/ethnic minority groups and from low-income families. Although only 16% of Caucasians aged 12-19 are obese, 24% of African Americans and 21% of Hispanics are obese. Obesity in childhood is particularly troubling given that obese children often develop many diseases in their youth that typically occur in adults, such as Type II diabetes. Frequently, these children also develop risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Furthermore, obesity in childhood increases the likelihood of obesity and its associated health problems in adulthood, including coronary heart disease, stroke, and cancer. In addition to the negative health effects of childhood obesity, the crisis also proves costly to the health care system. It is estimated that childhood obesity costs the U.S. approximately \$3 billion a year, and this number will only grow worse if we fail to correct this problem.

* Although many factors contribute to the increased obesity of our children, including the lack of nutrition in many children's diets, a key variable is that the American life style has changed to be more sedentary both in school and at home. Physical activity during the school day is restricted much more now than in the past. Only 15% of middle schools and 3% of high schools offer all their students physical education three or more days a week. Many schools offer PE only once a week, with recess seen as an extra rather than a key part of child development. In the past, children played outside for hours after school, but active outdoor time is now much rarer. A 2009 study found that children ages 8-18 watch an average of three hours of television a day. Although these factors affect all children, they are intensified for minority and low income children. Schools in low income areas often cut physical education to one day a week to focus on reading and math. Minimum wage jobs rarely offer the flexibility needed to get kids to sports practices and events; doing so is even harder when public transportation is necessary. Some communities lack safe places to play outdoors, so children engage in more sedentary activities inside. Frequently, low income communities lack grocery stores and options for fresh produce. We must work to reemphasize the importance of physical activity, so that each child has an equal chance at living a healthy life.

* We cannot allow this unwholesome future to become the destiny of America's children. Let us instead face this problem, and help these children. We can begin to fight this epidemic by recognizing the importance of physical education and sport in children's lives. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to support House Resolution 1373.