

The Harman Report

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by Dianne Harman

As a member of the statewide California Wellness Task Force, I am well aware of the problems related to childhood obesity. The Task Force has spent a great deal of time looking at the epidemic of overweight children and children who fail routine physical fitness tests.

Here are some “food for thought” statistics from studies recently conducted by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy:

There is an epidemic of overweight children in every corner of the State. In the 67th Assembly District, the District represented by my husband, Assemblyman Tom Harman, 22.4% of the children were overweight and 33.1% of the children did not meet acceptable fitness levels. As frightening as these figures are, the 67th Assembly District fared better than the rest of the state, whose numbers overall are 26.5% of the children being overweight and 39.6% of the children failing fitness standards;

Mortality rates in California have been declining over the last decade, but diabetes-related deaths have climbed every year since 1996. Overweight children face a far greater risk of developing health problems, including Type 2 Diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma, as well as low self-esteem, poor body image and symptoms of depression;

Physical inactivity and nutrition-related diseases are the second-leading cause of preventable death. These diseases account for 28% of preventable deaths each year, more than AIDS, gang violence, car crashes, alcohol and drugs combined.

Based on the work done by the Task Force, as well as widespread public knowledge about these staggering statistics, Governor Schwarzenegger has announced his intention to convene a Governor’s Summit on Obesity which will be held in Sacramento this coming February 9th and 10th. Over 100 “Captains of Industry” have been invited to participate in this Summit. Hopefully, they will make appropriate recommendations to the Legislature on how to address this huge problem which affects all segments of our society.

So what can be done about this problem? Well, here are two immediate recommendations that I would make for addressing the problem:

Enforce the existing state law that mandates 200-400 minutes of physical education every 10 days in grades 1 - 12. The physical health of our students should be just as important as their test scores;

Existing elementary school nutrition standards, prescribed by a state law enacted in 2001, should be implemented without further delay.

I'm glad the Governor has begun to address the problem of childhood obesity. If you aren't affected by this epidemic, take a moment to stop and look around. Chances are that someone you know is or soon will be!

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