

Let's Move

by Pam Pugh

First ladies use their position to champion causes they are passionate about, such as literacy, mental health, drug abuse, health care, education, and addictions.

Our current first lady, Michelle Obama, came to the White House declaring that her primary role at this point in her life is to be a mom, providing daughters Malia and Sasha with as normal a childhood as possible in their fishbowl life. Many of her activities—such as inviting local schoolchildren to plant a garden on the South Lawn of the White House—have complemented this priority. So a natural step for her is to take up the goal of eliminating childhood obesity in a generation with the “Let’s Move” campaign.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of obesity for two to six year olds has doubled since 1980, and has tripled in children ages six to eleven. How has this happened? Experts and anyone with common sense point to factors such as sedentary children who spend too much time in front of a screen, and overbooked kids whose busy families eat too much fast food. Mix in food additives and bovine growth hormones, and we have a recipe for trouble. Some schools have cut down on gym classes and even recess. Many neighborhoods are in a so-called food desert, where fast-food abounds, but where it is more difficult to shop for healthy groceries.

And school lunchrooms have been named a major culprit in enabling overweight children. We already have national programs that provide breakfast and lunches in schools, yet some of this money is used to serve nachos smothered with processed cheese sauce instead of protein and a plum. Healthy food served in schools is one of Mrs. Obama’s goals in the fight against childhood obesity, and that will take more funding.

We are rightly concerned that when there is federal money to be had, legislators will squeeze their way in to the trough and try to add pork to any bill. Special interest groups will certainly clamor for a greater piece of the pie, so to speak. Some of us will always be suspicious of the motives of anyone in Washington. But Mrs. Obama’s ambitious Let’s Move campaign is one we should support.

Eleanor Roosevelt opened new territory for American first ladies, and said, “I just did what I had to do as things came along.” Michelle Obama said, “I have the platform to . . . shine a spotlight on this issue in a way that I couldn’t do as a regular mom.” You have a platform of influence too, though you might feel it’s more like a stool. How can you make the most of it? What can any of us do to help end childhood obesity in a generation? Press your local school to serve good food and follow up on them next month and next year when the excitement of a new strategy wanes. See what can be done to add to the phys ed program at your schools. Encourage bananas over brownies at your church’s VBS or kids clubs. And drop an e-mail to our first lady and tell her you support “Let’s Move.” She should hear encouraging messages from Christians for her efforts.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,” recommends the writer of Ecclesiastes. Good advice, whether you’re doing it from a platform or a stool. Let’s move. Just trying to do my part, this is Pam Pugh for Moody Radio.