

We've arrived at that wonderful time of year when the heat breaks, leaves begin to turn, the sights and sounds of harvest begin, and we sometimes hear the sounds of a high-school marching band. But this fall, you might hear a different sound: the sound of students' growling stomachs.

This back-to-school season, children and teenagers in Iowa and across the country faced a rude awakening in the cafeteria. When lunch time rolled around, their portions were dramatically smaller than the year before. That's because school administrators are scrambling to comply with new federal standards that significantly trim the diet being served from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The new "calorie maximums" are broken down in three categories: grades K-5, grades 6-8 and grades 9-12. For a student in the sixth grade, last year the federal government recommended a lunch of a minimum 785 calories. This year, that same sixth-grade student will be fed a maximum of 700 calories.

I can still remember the pains of that sixth grade growth spurt and can only imagine such a scant diet. This unprecedented move of adding a maximum calorie intake is a prime example of the perils of liberal ideology.

Worse yet, the U.S. Department of Agriculture wrote these new rules much too broadly. Should we really feed a fifth-grader the same 550-calorie minimum ration as a kindergartner?

In fact, a fifth-grader weighs, on average, nearly double the weight of a typical kindergartner. For high school rations, the maximum is 850 calories per meal and three meals per day.

If I were on this diet I would lose a pound every eight days and I'm past my growth spurt. Kids are of varying sizes, activity levels and metabolism rates. How can we expect each child to flourish and grow on subsistence diets? This all because some are overweight.

Reduced carbohydrates and meat portions are leaving children so hungry that by the end of the day, parents meet their children at school with snacks just to get them home or to sports. Moms and dads around Iowa are frustrated with the "one size fits all" program that leaves their kids starving at the end of the day. These kids are simply not getting enough to eat, and they are expected to function throughout a school day and participate in sports and extracurricular activities on empty stomachs. Healthy, active kids need all the nutritious food they want.

Does this seem like the America you know? How did we get here? The bottom line is that President Obama and his administration are consistently finding more and more ways to overregulate our lives.

Let's take a look at some of the moves this administration and the Democrats in Congress have made. First lady Michelle Obama took on the worthy task of beating childhood obesity and championed a program called "Let's Move" and a bill called the "Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act," which was passed by a discredited Congress in the lame duck session of 2010.

I opposed the bill and said then it would lead to the USDA controlling students' diets. My prediction has come true to the detriment of our children.

We know that Secretary Tom Vilsack's USDA has an anti-meat agenda. Just a few weeks ago the Department of Agriculture proposed the seemingly heretical "Meatless Mondays" (for USDA employees) that was beaten back by public outcry. Clearly that anti-meat attitude can be seen in this rule-making process: Agriculture Under Secretary Kevin Concannon was quoted in Politico as saying, "The reform will also create a 'friendlier food environment' for vegetarian and vegan students by allowing for meals containing tofu and more legumes."

A ration of only 2 ounces of meat per day is an unfriendly food environment for everyone.

Big government's flaws are clearly not obvious to Vilsack, who spoke about the effects of the new regulations on children when they were announced: "We must do everything possible to provide them the nutrition they need to be healthy, active and ready to face the future."

Health was the goal, but the result is far from it.

Our government has been transformed into a nanny state by the president, first lady and Secretary Vilsack. It has become so intrusive that it now determines and rations the kind of foods we put into our bodies. What's next?

From the family farm to the lunch tray, Obama and his administration's views are nothing short of extreme, and continually promote complete dependence on and obedience to government. Because some kids are overweight, the USDA has put all kids on a government diet.