

Starting a new school year is typically filled with excitement and many changes, but this year kids and parents across our nation are dealing with big surprises in the lunch room. Thanks to new calorie bracket regulations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, children are going hungry in our school cafeterias. The background of the rule and the outcry from parents and children has led to our legislative response, the "No Hungry Kids Act."

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

When First Lady Michelle Obama decided to tackle childhood obesity as her primary goal, it was often seen as a noble one. Yet these new regulations resulting from the "Let's Move" campaign became law because of the "Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act." This law, passed by a discredited Congress in the lame duck session of 2010, gave the USDA free reign to change the school lunch requirements.

Kids across the nation are trying to get through the hours in the classroom and in their extracurricular activities after school without enough nutritious food to keep them motivated. Both carbohydrate and meat portions have been dramatically reduced, leaving kids no choice but to turn to social media through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to express their frustration. Teenagers in Kansas produced a parody of a popular song they re-titled "We are Hungry." Those who felt they had no choice have started protesting the new standards in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Kansas and elsewhere. On our Facebook forum, one teacher expressed that she has now built in a new snack time to get her students focused, stating what should be obvious to Washington - "You cannot teach a hungry child."

The bottom line is that President Obama and his administration continue to find ways to develop the nanny state. If they have found a way to invade the lunch tray of the youngest members of our society, what's next? The new regulations are a one-size-fits-all encroachment of our liberties. The president's technique of using class warfare is now also seen in the lunch line today. If children can afford to buy more a la carte items, they may do so to supplement their lunches. This leaves those children whose families cannot afford to supplement the bare minimum even hungrier. For many children, lunch is the only complete meal they will have each day, and this provides even greater concern for the smaller portions.

The concern over the health and future of our children is the exact reason why we have introduced the "No Hungry Kids Act." The "No Hungry Kids Act" repeals the USDA rule that created the new standards, prohibits the USDA's upper caloric limits, and will protect rights of parents to send their children to school with the foods of their choice. The goal of the school lunch program was - and still should be - to ensure students receive enough nutrition to be healthy and to learn. The misguided nanny state, as advanced by Michelle Obama's "Healthy and Hunger Free Kids Act," was interpreted by USDA Secretary Vilsack to be a directive that, because some kids are overweight, every child should be put on a diet. Parents know that their kids deserve all of the healthy and nutritious food they want.

The USDA's new school lunch guidelines are a perfect example of what is wrong with government: more spending, misguided inputs, tremendous waste, and unaccomplished goals. Thanks to the Nutrition Nannies at the USDA, America's children are going hungry at school today. This is no way to educate the leaders of tomorrow.

*King and Huelskamp both serve on the House Agriculture Committee.*