

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Mary Bono Mack
Joint Hearing of Energy and Commerce Subcommittees on
Health and on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
"Food Marketing: Can 'Voluntary' Government
Restrictions Improve Children's Health?"
October 12, 2011
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

Today, the evidence is all around us. There is an indisputable link between childhood obesity and diabetes. More and more overweight kids are leading to more and more cases of full-blown diabetes among children all across America. That alarming trend demands our attention.

But what's far less clear to me is whether the Interagency Working Group's proposed Nutrition Principles are even achievable for most food groups and what effect they could have on food prices. Hopefully, we can get some straight answers to these and some other very important questions before committing to a national policy that may shrink family budgets but not waistlines.

Clearly, the IWG's initial proposal went way too far. It had a dangerously-high content of "plausibility." To its credit, the Federal Trade Commission did substitute a little common sense for an otherwise rigid menu that could leave American businesses, as well as consumers, with a bad case of heartburn.

People are smart enough to recognize that Girl Scout cookies or a cake bought at a bake sale are not health foods and then act accordingly. But that said, I still remain very concerned that healthy foods like yogurt could wind up not meeting these new standards. So much for counting calories.

I am also concerned by a lack of science-based evidence in some of the IWG's recommendations. For example, despite study after study, the link between saturated fat and obesity remains inconclusive. Is there a plausible connection? Yes. But is there a definitive one? No. Over the years, Americans have decreased their saturated animal fat intake and yet cardiovascular disease rates remain mostly unchanged.

I'm also worried about what may happen every time there's a new cook in the kitchen. While these standards are "voluntary," they can be changed on a whim, creating uncertainty for both businesses and consumers. Let's rethink that approach before the standards become finalized.

As a former small business owner, I'm troubled as well by the impact that the IWG's Nutrition Principles could have on smaller U.S. companies, which often struggle to comply with these types of standards. I am anxious to learn what steps are being taken to ensure that thousands of Americans don't lose their jobs at a time when unemployment nationwide stands at a stubborn 9.1 percent.

And finally, why hasn't this committee received the IWG report which was supposed to be delivered to Congress by July 15, 2010? Frankly, we'd like to find out what you have been cooking up in kitchen. Right now, I'm not sure that I like the smell of it.

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