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2005 AUG -8 A 11: 53

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August 1, 2005

Secretary Michael Leavitt
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

On July 13, the Center for Science in the Public Interest submitted a petition to your Department through the Food and Drug Administration to require health messages on the labels of soft drinks. Many in the nutrition field have supported this petition. I would like to add my name to the list of those who are requesting that this petition receive favorable review by the Department.

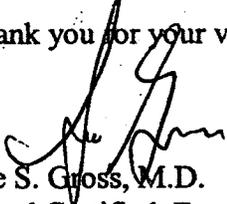
In May 2004, review of three years of U.S. dietary data culminated in a paper published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggesting a connection between soft drinks and diabetes. This collaborative effort led by me, including researchers from Harvard School of Public Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, concluded that rapidly escalating consumption of High Fructose Corn Syrup paralleled the rise in diabetes in the US over the past century. These findings were independent of total Calories consumed. As you are probably aware, HFCS is the sweetener of choice for the beverage industry. According to our analysis, it now accounts for more than 10% of total daily Calorie intake and 20% of daily carbohydrate intake. Over the past few years, a large body of evidence has been gathered, supporting our findings.

As a researcher and family physician, I have the opportunity to witness the problem first-hand in my practice. Many have argued that warnings are unnecessary because people already know that taking in too many calories will lead to obesity and diabetes. This couldn't be further from the truth. Surprisingly, people do not recognize the calories associated with sweetened beverages as significant. They are frequently quite surprised to find that these beverages are contributing to their weight difficulties. It is not uncommon for children to consume 3 or more sweetened beverages per day, especially in school. I am more frequently diagnosing children with the Metabolic Syndrome, a pre-diabetic condition. Recent data suggest that nearly 70% of obese children meet criteria to diagnose the Metabolic Syndrome. It is rarely the case that these children are not large consumers of sweetened beverages. Fortunately, when

these beverages are discontinued, the metabolic abnormalities are rapidly reversed before permanent damage, but those that are not screened will certainly be less fortunate. As fewer children are insured, this will become a much more significant public health problem, and is already reaching a critical mass.

Why should we single out the beverage industry? Simply put, they are the largest single source of "nutrition" for America's youth. We are a Nation that places warnings on over-the-counter sleep aids that they "may cause drowsiness", but choose to ignore obvious warnings about the consumption of these beverages based upon pressure from the beverage industry. I would also highly encourage support of the petition's recommendations to fund a mass-media campaign to educate our children.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration of this important matter.



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