

# **BEFORE THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

In re: **Scheduled Photograph Opportunities  
Involving Executive Officers**

Docket No. \_\_\_\_

## **PETITION FOR EXECUTIVE ACTION**

**Submitted to:**

Office of the President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500  
Fax: 202-456-2461

**Date:**

May 10, 2012

**Reply to:**

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine  
c/o Neal Barnard, M.D., President  
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Washington, DC 20016  
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## **1. Action Requested**

Since the 1930s, the executive branch of the federal government has extensively used preplanned photography sessions, commonly known as “photo ops,” to share notable events with the public and to commemorate important milestones. These events are often staged so as to create a specific image or to communicate a specific idea. The White House Office of Communications plans and organizes these events.

In recent years, staged photo ops have frequently made use of food as a prop in order to create images about federal officials and their colleagues. Increasingly, the use of food in photo ops conflicts with important messages that public health officials are trying to convey in order to safeguard the health of the American public.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (“PCRM”) requests that the president issue an executive order requiring that photo ops that feature the president, vice president, first family, or members of the cabinet exclude any prominent use of carcinogenic or obesogenic foods.

## **2. Factual Background**

**Cancer:** More than 1.5 million new cancer cases are diagnosed annually. Cancer kills about 570,000 Americans each year, accounting for one in every four deaths.

Much of the cancer burden is caused by unhealthful foods. This is particularly clear for colorectal cancer, the third most common cancer in the world. According to a 2007 report by the American Institute for Cancer Research (“AICR”) and the World Cancer Research Fund, 45 percent of all colorectal cancer cases—more than 60,000 cases annually—could be prevented if people ate more plant foods and less meat and made other lifestyle changes.

The strongest scientific evidence linking food and colorectal cancer relates to processed meats—hot dogs, pepperoni, bacon, ham, and deli meats. AICR scientists concluded that colorectal cancer risk increases by 21 percent for every 50 grams of processed meat consumed daily. A 50-gram serving is approximately the size of a typical hot dog. Many people have bacon or sausage for breakfast, hot dogs, ham, or deli slices at lunch, and other processed meats as a pizza topping at dinner. Most have no idea of the association with cancer, because the government has failed to adequately publicize the findings of medical research. They continue to subject themselves and their families to carcinogenic foods, and more than 140,000 annually are diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Many are untreatable by the time they are diagnosed.

The risks of processed meats extend beyond colorectal cancer. The NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study found that processed red meat consumption was associated with an increased risk of prostate cancer. Other studies have linked these products with ovarian cancer, leukemia, and other malignancies. A review in the journal *Diabetologia* found that those who regularly eat processed meats increase their risk for diabetes by 41

percent. A recent Harvard study said that eating a daily serving of processed meat can increase the risk of premature mortality by 20 percent.

Although cancer may be the most alarming threat posed by unhealthful foods, it is far from the only one.

**Obesity:** The obesity epidemic has grown dramatically in recent years, most notably in children. More than two-thirds of adults and one-third of children in the United States are overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”).

Obesity increases the risk for heart disease, diabetes, and certain forms of cancer, among other problems:

Cardiovascular Disease: About 81.1 million people in the United States have at least one form of cardiovascular disease. Approximately 2,300 Americans die every day from cardiovascular disease.

Diabetes: An estimated 25.8 million Americans have diabetes. Another 79 million adults have prediabetes. According to CDC predictions, one in three children born in 2000 will develop diabetes at some point in their lives.

Hypertension: About 74.5 million American adults—about one-third of the adult population—have high blood pressure. In 2006, hypertension killed 56,561 Americans, with African-American women and men more than two and three times as likely to die from hypertension, respectively, compared with their white counterparts.

The obesity epidemic is primarily attributable to poor food habits. Between 1909 and 2007, the average American’s meat intake increased from 124 pounds per year to more than 200 pounds per year. Cheese intake rose from less than 4 pounds to nearly 33 pounds per year. Intake of sweeteners and added oils rose as well. All of these foods are calorie-dense, holding far more calories per unit weight, compared with fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes.

A report in the May 2009 *Diabetes Care*, published by the American Diabetes Association, showed that people who consume meat and dairy regularly are, on average, much heavier, compared with Americans who generally avoid these products. A healthy body mass index is between 18.5 and 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The average body mass index of meat-eaters, reported by the *Diabetes Care* article, was 28.8, compared with a healthy 23.6 for people who generally avoided meat and dairy products. The study also showed that the more people removed animal products from their diets, the healthier their body weight and the lower their risk of diabetes became.

Studies have also demonstrated an unsavory role for dairy products, which are the leading source of saturated (“bad”) fat in the American diet. Several studies have also linked

dairy products to prostate cancer, presumably because of their tendency to increase insulin-like growth factor concentrations in the bloodstream or reduce vitamin D activation. No such association has been made with nondairy milk products, such as soymilk or almond milk.

The cost of poor health is both personal and financial. Cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and hypertension cut short the lives of affected individuals and are major contributors to serious disabilities. For diabetes, these include blindness, loss of kidney function, amputations, and chronic neuropathic pain and dysfunction.

The direct medical costs (payments to health care professionals, hospitals and nursing homes, medications, and medical supplies) of chronic diseases run in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually. The direct medical costs associated with obesity in 2008 totaled \$147 billion. In 2010, heart disease cost \$189 billion dollars, hypertension cost \$55 billion dollars, and cancer cost \$103 billion. Diabetes cost \$116 billion dollars in 2007. Indirect and intangible costs, such as lost productivity and pain and suffering, add considerably more.

Despite efforts by organizations working to reverse America's current health trends, health care costs are expected to increase substantially over the next decades. The American Heart Association estimates that, by 2030, direct costs related to cardiovascular disease will triple to around \$818 billion. The costs for treating cancer are projected to increase to \$173 billion by 2020. According to the CDC, diabetes prevalence will increase to one in three by 2050, compared with roughly one in 10 today.

### **3. Photo Ops Promoting Unhealthful Foods**

Presidents are often pictured in food-related photo ops. These contrived events routinely conflict with health messages and often present in a favorable light the foods that have been shown to contribute most strongly to cancer, obesity, and premature mortality. A typical photo op depicts a current president entertaining a foreign dignitary, with both leaders stuffing processed meats or hamburgers into their mouths for the assembled cameras. The resulting photographs are disseminated far more widely than the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* or any other health messages. These staged events perpetuate ignorance about health and nutrition and provide considerable aid and comfort to the enemies of America's health.

When prominent individuals are pictured with commercial products, the prominence of those products in the marketplace is dramatically enhanced. This is why movie studios are able to charge substantial sums of money for product placement. While public officials have come to understand that they do the public no favors if they are photographed using tobacco, they have not come to a similar recognition regarding their favorable depictions of carcinogenic and obesogenic foods which currently harm and kill far more Americans than tobacco. As leading role models for the American public and much of the rest of the world, public officials have an important responsibility in this

regard. While federal officials are free to eat whatever they may wish to in their private lives, officially orchestrated photo ops should promote healthful messages.

All recent presidents and both major parties have been involved in such events:

- March 14, 2012. As part of an ongoing and publicized “gift exchange,” President Barack Obama gave British Prime Minister David Cameron a grill.
- March 13, 2012. During the popular NCAA basketball finals referred to as March Madness, President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron eat hot dogs for the cameras at a basketball game.
- June 24, 2011. President Obama and visiting Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ate cheddar cheeseburgers at highly publicized trip to the Ray’s Hell Burger restaurant.
- May 26, 2011. President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron served barbecue to British and American service members and veterans in a widely publicized event at 10 Downing St.
- May 29, 2009. President Obama stopped into a local burger restaurant in D.C., Five Guys, and ate a cheeseburger with reporters.
- Aug. 11, 2007. While entertaining French President Nicolas Sarkozy, President George W. Bush and the French president ate hot dogs and hamburgers at the president’s home in Maine.
- Jan. 15, 1996. President Bill Clinton met with Georgia Governor Zell Miller at the Varsity over a grilled chicken sandwich.
- June 14, 1994. Bill Clinton was photographed with a platter of barbecue at Gates and Sons Bar-B-Q in Kansas City, MO.
- 1990. During his first term, President George H.W. Bush was photographed eating a hot dog at Atlanta’s famous drive-in, the Varsity.
- Presidential Campaign, 1988. On the campaign trail, George H.W. Bush told *USA Today* of his love for pork rinds.
- Oct. 15, 1984. Ronald Reagan ate a McDonald’s hamburger in Tuscaloosa, Ala., during a presidential campaign stop.
- 1981-1989. During the presidency of Ronald Reagan, Jelly Belly jelly beans were served in the Oval Office and on Air Force One.



**President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron eating hot dogs during an official visit photo op, 2012.**



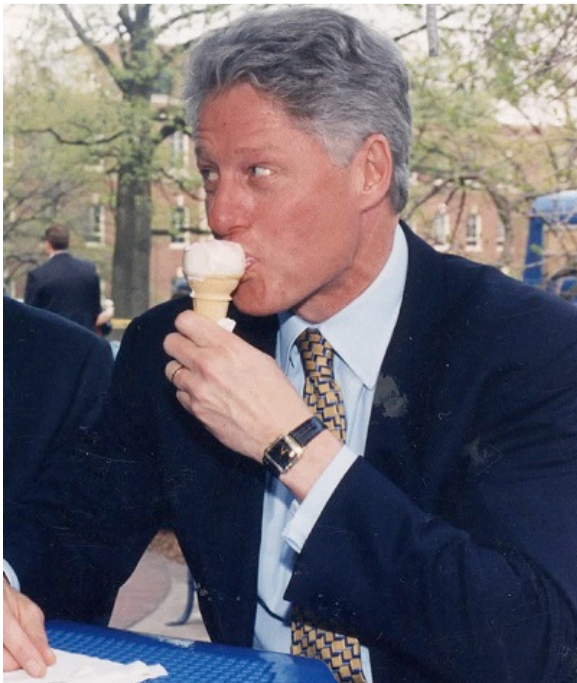
**Prime Minister Cameron and President Obama served meats at a highly publicized barbecue in 2011.**



**President Obama eating a chili dog for the cameras, 2011.**



**President Bush eating a hot dog in a 1998 photo-op.**



**President Clinton eating ice cream in a 1996 photo op.**



President Reagan eating Big Mac hamburger, 1984.

#### **4. Request**

In light of the continuing high rates of cancer and the worsening obesity epidemic, there is no justification for encouraging Americans to eat foods that will harm them and their children. Instead, photo ops that include food should portray government officials consuming healthfully.

We therefore request that the president issue an executive order mandating that photo ops that feature the president, vice president, first family, or members of the cabinet in their roles as public spokespeople at official events exclude carcinogenic or obesogenic foods.