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## Evaluation of Radley Balko's Writing on the Importance of Having a Healthy Lifestyle

In Radley Balko's essay "What You Eat Is Your Business," he argues that what we put into our bodies is our business, and it is our responsibility to make healthy choices. The widespread epidemic of obesity can only be solved if people become more aware of the choices they make and take control of their own health. He emphasizes on the need for personal responsibility when it comes to nutritional choices and insists that the government shouldn't be interfering with the choice of consumers. As an individual's health and well being is becoming a matter of public health, Balko states that America's health care system is moving towards socialism. Politicians are spending millions in trying to ban snacks and soda from public vending machines, raising funds for bike trails and sidewalks, and sometimes going to the extent of suggesting a "fat tax". Laws have been passed that require some people to pay for somebody else's health problems. In the words of Balko:

"We're becoming less responsible for our own health, and more responsible for everyone else's. Your heart attack drives up the cost of my premiums and office visits. And if the government is paying for my anti-cholesterol medication, what incentive is there for me to put down the cheeseburger?" (467).

This points to the fact that the price of all premiums are equal, and there is little or no initiative to eat healthy since there are no higher premiums for obese people. By removing obesity from the realm of "public health" and by making unhealthy people pay their own bills, Balko believes that people will learn to be more responsible, and that we would take a big leap towards solving the rampant problem of obesity.

I am of two minds with regard to the arguments put forward by Balko. Although I completely appreciate Balko's argument that personal responsibility is paramount, I also believe that it is becoming nearly impossible for the government to stay out of healthcare. Healthcare is now the government's business by law. I do agree with Balko's stance that the choice of food I eat is nobody's business but mine. It is the freedom of choice that every citizen needs to make his own decisions. But at the same time, I see a lot of caveats in Balko's argument. I believe that this is our country. If we don't care for our citizens, who will? We should naturally be concerned as to why so many of our citizens are suffering with obesity. I disagree with Balko's idea that the government shouldn't be taking initiatives like removing junk food from vending machines in schools and enforcing detailed food labels with calorie counts. I believe such initiatives are a wiser use of the government's budget, and is a more practical solution for the government to

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implement than trying to preach about healthy choices to millions of people in the country. In opposition to Balko, David Zinczenko in his essay “Don’t Blame the Eater,” states that the government must regulate the fast food industry similar to how they regulate the tobacco companies. Zinczenko points out that fast food restaurants “were the only available options for an American kid to get an affordable meal” (462). Zinczenko’s argument about comparing fast food to tobacco is a very powerful argument. Although I feel it is a little extreme to compare fast food with tobacco, I do see his point. “Advertisements don’t carry warning labels the way tobacco ads do” (463), he states.

However, having said this, I am of the opinion that obesity is not a problem with a single variable. One has to do a lot more than just eat poorly to become obese. I believe that the government along with removing junk food from public vending machines, should be promoting and subsidizing membership in the gyms. They should be building more public gyms, and encourage people to make a trip to the gym at least thrice a week. Other measures like promoting the use of bikes to travel short distances would go a long way in keeping people fit and active. I think using a bike to make a trip to the hair saloon across the street, or to the grocery store a mile away has two advantages. The obvious advantage is that you would end up burning a few extra calories, but you would also end up saving on fuel costs to travel short distances.

Further I also believe that not everyone who is fat is obese per say. There is a big difference between being fat and being obese. As Mary Maxfield suggests in her article “Food as Thought” that our society has false impressions and has convinced itself that a person who is overweight is unhealthy. It seems to me that Balko is categorizing people into different segments based on what they eat and how much they weigh. This is exactly what Maxfield despises, and states that “Food-be it French fry or granola bar, Twinkie or brown rice-isn’t moral or immoral.” (446) She goes on to say that “When we attempt to rise above our animal nature through the moralization of food, we unnecessarily complicate the practice of eating.” (446)

So according to me the final resolution to the problem of obesity lies in adopting the good parts of each of these strategies. The government definitely needs to get involved with what we eat, enforce more detailed nutrition labels, subsidize gym memberships and at the same time we need to do our part well. Our part is to read and educate ourselves about better food choices, on cultivating a better daily routine that includes at least thirty minutes of exercise. So although what you eat is surely your business, it is harsh to isolate people suffering from obesity and not offer them help. A combined effort from our end and the government is where the resolution to this complex problem lies. As Maxfield succinctly puts it “Trust yourself. Trust your body. Meet your needs.”

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