

Step Away from the Counter

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Friday, October 15, 2010

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When I was in college I clerked in a liquor store for a while. It was a great job for a student. On weekends we worked hard, but during the week the store was not busy and I was able to study hard.

I had a legal responsibility to not sell alcohol to people that were intoxicated. Not only did I face criminal action, but as it was explained to me I could also face civil liabilities. It is not always easy to tell if someone was over the limit. It is almost always an argument when you refuse to sell to them, but I did do so a few times.

I was in Walgreens the other day purchasing a bag of ice. At one of the other counters was a young lady. My estimation of her age was late teens, maybe early twenties. I have trouble determining those ages now. They all look young to me. Add to this that she was so obese that her face was almost featureless. She was at the stage of obesity that she waddled more than walked. I am still attempting to understand why when I see people in this state it saddens me so. After all it is their journey, not mine.

She was at the counter with 3 pints of ice cream, a bag of chips and 2 cokes. My bet would be that those were her 3 basic food groups. It was obvious to me that she was over the limit on calories and really did not need the next “drink”. However, there is no law stating that you face penalties if you abet obese people in their self destructive habits.

Exactly where is that line between individual freedoms and a “nanny state”? It varies from person to person, frequently dramatically. I firmly believe that drugs should be legalized. Not because drugs are a good thing, but because keeping drugs illegal is harming society in any number of ways. I have no problem with people having logical consequences for their actions... as long as I as a member of society do not have to bear the cost of their logical consequences. With this young lady and others of her ilk we will be bearing the cost through higher health care expenses.

At one level it really was not this young person’s responsibility that she was in the state she was in. We live in a society that pushes over consumption and immediate gratification. Our food chain is controlled by mega corporations that push unhealthy foods that net them the highest profit. Go to the supermarket and start reading labels. It is a very scary proposition. While we idolize our athletes we are not a society that cherishes physical activity. Hence all my grumblings about folks telling me I am weird for walking when I golf.

Obesity seems to know no social economic bounds now days, but it does affect the poorer segment more than the upper. I wonder if there is some correlation between the widening wealth gap and rising obesity rates. Consider that another random thought.

I would not prevent folks from purchasing whatever food items they saw fit. I do think that we as society need to attack this problem more vigorous, if for not other reason than it obesity attacks our society in

multiple ways. Somehow we need to rein in industrial food corporations that are shoveling this junk down so many throats. I'm not holding my breath though.

Some obesity facts:

- The likelihood of being overweight in the poorest 25% of the population is twice that of people in the highest quarter of economic class
- The prevalence of significant obesity (body mass index over 30) in the U.S. population is 29% for Caucasians, 34% for Hispanics and 40% for African Americans. Fully 78% of African American females are overweight or obese
- A report released September, 2010 by the Brookings Institution finds that obesity costs the U.S. \$215 billion annually in direct medical expenses and indirect productivity losses; The researchers also found that transportation costs may be higher due to the added weight of obese travelers
[Brookings Obesity Study](#)
- Optimal BMI for women is between 20 and 22.5; for men it is 22.5 to 25; the latest data I could find was for 2002 and gave the US average at 28
- The less education you have the more likely you are to be obese. This is especially true for women.
- Mississippi is the fattest state; Tennessee and Alabama tie for second.
- Obesity increases the likelihood of various diseases, particularly heart disease, type 2 diabetes, breathing difficulties during sleep, certain types of cancer and osteoarthritis
- On average, obesity reduces life expectancy by six to seven years
- USA is by far the fattest nation with an obesity rate of 30.6%. Mexico is second at 24.2%. Our neighbor to the north is 11th with a rate of 14.3% [Obesity rates by country](#)