Banning advertising on food products intended for children is, in our opinion, a good way to miss the target.

By Éric Lanthier

For: Geneviève Borris and Matthew McLachlan as part of the Media and Ethics course given at Saint Paul University

Summary of our position: in our opinion, instead of confronting obesity, Bill S-228 attacks parental authority, creativity and free enterprise. We would prefer to encourage health.
Bill S-228, entitled *An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children)* should be passed by the Senate before the Christmas break. S-228 is not strategic and does not help to galvanize civil society in a healthy manner. Instead of confronting a worrisome problem, the Honourable Nancy Greene-Raine puts the burden on the backs of parents and private enterprise. Strategically, it would have been more advantageous to make them allies. Rather, the Conservative Senator prefers to make their lives difficult and to make herself look good in front of the lobbies that encourage her to act in such a manner.

**Reducing obesity**

Given that we are all first and foremost in support of this cause, it is entirely normal that we want to reduce the number of overweight people. It is definitively a scourge that we should not wait to address, since the number of obese and overweight people has risen, according to [Statistics Canada](http://www.statcan.gc.ca) from 13,099,396 to 14,222,521, between 2010 and 2014. This number represents approximately twice the population of our ten largest cities in Canada; it’s quite something.

**Economic weight**

Not only is the number of obese and overweight people increasing, but the health costs associated with this increase play a key role. As a matter of fact, according to the [research chair on obesity at Laval University](http://www.ulaval.ca) the financial burden
associated with the phenomenon was estimated at $4.3 billion in 2001.

According to the same sources, physical inactivity costs taxpayers $5.3 billion. In 2006, the Institut national de la santé publique du Québec (Inspq) [3] estimated that, in Canada, this cost has gone up to $6 billion. However, this amount does not take into account the $5 billion that is spent to make up for costs related to lost productivity caused by obesity and overweight.

**Healthy involvement of the State**

Senator Greene-Raine’s concern is wise; however, she is not attacking the right target. The problem is that the methods that she intends to use to reach her goal negatively affect fundamental values: parental authority, free enterprise and creativity. Before going after these values, the government would benefit from establishing a plan that:

- encourages access to exercise;
- implements a strategy to increase the consumption of healthy food;
- encourages businesses that sell healthy foods to create more attractive packaging for children;
- informs parents and all consumers;
- requires that the sugar content be listed on the front of products; and
asks businesses to indicate on the front of products if the quantity of sugar or fat surpasses the maximum daily amount required using a universal Canadian symbol.

**Targeting obesity and overweight**

If Senator Greene-Raine’s motivation is to reduce childhood obesity and overweight, she is taking the wrong approach. Her goal is commendable, but the method is not very relevant. Her bill makes me think of someone who wants to lose 15 kilograms by removing one teaspoon of sugar from his coffee. Is reducing sugar a good thing? Yes! Is it the best way to lose 15 kilos? The answer lies in the question itself.

To counter the increase in obesity and overweight in Canada, we must promote another more inspiring, more stimulating lifestyle, and this is done through measures that encourage people to live a healthy life and not by attacking free enterprise, short-circuiting creativity or usurping parental roles. I hope that the senators and the House of Commons will unite to strike at the source of the problem, not imaginary characters on a cardboard box.

In conclusion, allow me to ask the following question:
What will the government do with products that are not mainly intended for children that use animals or images that are attractive to children?

Thank you for the interest you have shown in our request.

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