

Time To Ban The Bans

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In 2008 alone, officials in the U.S. banned -- or tried to ban -- a multitude of "dangers" in our everyday lives. A small sampling of targeted items includes *trans* fats, plastic bags, "fast food" restaurants, helium balloons, camp fires, circuses, homeschooling, baggy pants, spanking, and ice cream trucks among others. The justification for this Good Humor crack down, as regulators spin it, is a "precautionary" approach to public health. But the description one political consultant gave to the London *Times* more accurately depicts this unsettling phenomenon: "It's becoming almost like an arms race as to who can ban more things."

For consumers, it's rapidly becoming a lose-lose situation.

These bans (or "structural interventions," as the San Francisco Department of Public Health has euphemistically dubbed them) go far beyond educating consumers, veering into the sort of heavy-handed government intrusions that have no place in a free society. Silverware is the only thing that should come between an individual and his dinner plate. And despite all of the lofty promises health officials offer in exchange for our freedom, many experts believe that *trans* fat bans, calorie-count mandates, and the rest of this dietary nitpicking is unlike to benefit our health. The reason is simple, according to Dr. Roger Clemens, a nutrition professor at California State University Northridge: "We don't have dangerous foods; we have dangerous lifestyles."

The World Health Organization estimates that 60 percent of the global population isn't active enough. Two million deaths each year are attributable to physical inactivity. And the solution to these "dangers" won't come from City Hall or the Statehouse. It boils down to this: personal health is about individual choices. That means turning off the TV, climbing the stairs, and taking that extra step.

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