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Jeff Cronin: 202-777-8370

## **Bush Administration Trying to Bury WHO Obesity Report** *Behind the Scenes Lobbying at Odds with Anti-Obesity Rhetoric*

WASHINGTON—Food makers are working hand in hand with the Bush Administration to undercut the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations on preventing obesity, watchdog groups say. According to the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy Thompson and lobbyists for the Grocery Manufacturers of America will go to Geneva next week to urge the WHO to withdraw, weaken, or postpone the release of its anti-obesity recommendations. According to CSPI, that effort runs counter to Secretary Thompson's public pronouncements about fighting obesity.

“Publicly, Secretary Thompson offers lip service about fighting obesity, but privately he's flying to Geneva with a squad of lobbyists intent on undermining the WHO's recommendations,” said CSPI legal affairs director Bruce Silverglade. “These tactics are reminiscent of the tobacco industry's sinister efforts to oppose global anti-smoking initiatives.”

The long-awaited Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, is scheduled to be approved next week in Geneva by the WHO Executive Board. The document calls on governments to restrict food advertising aimed at children, to use fiscal and pricing policies to discourage consumption of junk foods, and to pressure the food industry to reduce the use of unhealthy ingredients like trans fatty acids.

A letter from William Steiger, a Special Assistant to Secretary Thompson to the WHO Director General calls for far weaker, unspecified policy approaches, like “better data and surveillance, and the promotion of sustainable strategies that focus on energy balance, individual responsibility, and strong public health approaches.”

“If the Administration wants better surveillance about obesity, it should dispatch Mr. Steiger to a shopping mall or a playground to get a look,” Silverglade said. “But it shouldn't send him to Switzerland to sabotage anti-obesity efforts around the world.”

Representatives of the Grocery Manufacturers of America have previously attended WHO meetings as a member of the U.S. government delegation. Daniel Spiegel, a lobbyist hired by the Grocery Manufacturers of America, is currently coordinating efforts by the food industry to delay approval of the WHO's Global Strategy.

The food industry has a history of trying to intimidate the WHO, according to CSPI. Last year the Sugar Association threatened the WHO that it would urge Congress to slash its funding because another WHO report recommended diets lower in added sugar. The Sugar Association recruited Senators Larry Craig (R-ID) and John Breaux (D-LA) to ask Secretary Thompson and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman to quash the report.

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*The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is a nonprofit health-advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., that focuses on nutrition and food safety. CSPI is supported largely by the 800,000 U.S. and Canadian subscribers to its **Nutrition Action Healthletter** and by foundation grants.*