

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
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“Go On The Offensive,” Secretary Thompson Tells Junk Food Lobby

Commercial Alert sent a letter today to U. S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, criticizing him for urging the junk food lobby to wage war on those who would protect children from obesity.

Secretary Thompson told members of the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) to “‘go on the offensive’ against critics blaming the food industry for obesity,” according to a November 12 GMA news release. GMA members include major junk food companies such as the Coca Cola Co., Mars Inc., PepsiCo Inc., and Philip Morris Cos.

The letter to Secretary Thompson follows.

Dear Secretary Thompson:

It appears that you are now urging war on Americans who are fighting obesity in children.

According to a recent release from the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), you stated as much at a recent meeting of the organization's board. To quote the GMA release, you "encouraged GMA members to 'go on the offensive' against critics blaming the food industry for obesity."

This is most interesting. As the nation's Secretary of Health and Human Services, you might have raised some questions for the nation's corporate food processors and dealers. You might have asked them, for example, why the foods they push at kids are so often high in sugar, calories and fat, and low in vitamins and minerals -- in other words, junk food.

You might have asked them too why they barrage kids with junk food advertising in the first place. After all, the Bush Administration claims to champion the role of parents in the home. How then could you condone the way that giant food corporations bypass parents and speak directly to impressionable children in order to seduce them into buying and eating junk foods?

Many American parents would like to see you raise such questions. They would like to see someone in Washington with the character and gumption to stand up to an industry that is constantly luring their kids. Instead you have told the food corporations exactly what they want to hear – that the problem is their critics and not themselves.

To deny that the junk food industry, and its artillery of marketing, has any role in the epidemic of childhood obesity is as absurd as the size of the soft money contributions that some GMA members made to the Republican Party during the 2002 election cycle.

You are currently under the employ of the United States Government; you are not a cheerleader for the likes of Philip Morris and Coca-Cola. If you cannot promote the health of our nation's children, or conceive of serving them and not the junk food industry, then it is time for you to clean out your desk, and join the corporate lobbyists on K Street.

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin
Executive Director
Commercial Alert

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The November 12 Grocery Manufacturers Association news release is available at:
<<http://www.gmabrands.com/news/docs/NewsRelease.cfm?DocID=1028&>>.

Commercial Alert's mission is to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy. Commercial Alert has more than 1,500 members representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, see our website at <<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.