

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **"Obesity Lobby" Will Carry Out CDC's New Program, Commercial Alert Charges**

Health & Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson launched a so-called "anti-obesity" program today for youth that will be implemented by the very interests that are pushing fatty foods and couch potato habits at the nation's kids.

The program involves a "partnership" between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and elements of the "obesity lobby," including corporations such as the Publicis Groupe advertising agencies, AOL Time Warner, Viacom and Primedia.

The CDC selected the Publicis Groupe's Frankel as the "lead agency" for its anti-obesity advertising campaign. Frankel also advertises for McDonalds. "This is like asking Jeffrey Skilling to head up the President's new Corporate Fraud Task Force," said Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert.

AOL Time Warner, Viacom & Primedia all have TV stations that promote junk food to children and teenagers, and encourage them to watch TV and play video games instead of exercising. "If these companies were really serious about doing something about childhood obesity they would stop doing these things. They would not seek to corral the time of children. They would not pitch junk food," Ruskin said.

On top of this, the CDC program is going to spend \$2.8 million this school year on advertising to children on Channel One. Channel One is an ad vehicle disguised as a news show that pitches junk food and soda pop to kids in the nation's classrooms. Channel One, which is owned by Primedia, has been foundering in recent years. "This new partnership will serve to prop up a prime propaganda vehicle for the obesity lobby," Ruskin said.

Commercial Alert sent letters today to three key Members of Congress, requesting them to investigate requesting them to investigate this connection.

In April, 2002, Henry Kravis of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, which is the majority owner of Primedia, gave \$250,000 in soft money to the Republican National Committee, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Jack Abramoff, a top Republican lobbyist and fundraiser, is Channel One's Washington lobbyist.

"Could this be a political payoff to help out a major Republican soft money donor and fundraiser?" the letters ask. "If Secretary Thompson were serious about fighting obesity, he would encourage our nation's schools to ban Channel One, instead of providing it with

legitimacy and advertising revenues.”

The requests for investigation were sent to Senator Joe Lieberman, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs; Senator Edward Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions; and Representative Henry Waxman, ranking member of the House Committee on Government Reform.

Commercial Alert also sent a letter today to Secretary Thompson, asking him whether he would ask media companies and advertising agencies, as a condition of receipt of CDC funds, to refuse to produce or show ads for high-added-fat, high-added-sugar foods such as soda pop, junk food and fast food.

Last week, President Bush said “There's no capitalism without conscience; there is no wealth without character.” “Media companies and ad agencies ought to have the character to stop pushing junk food at our nation's kids,” Ruskin said. “And Secretary Thompson ought to have the character to ask them to do so.”

In May, Commercial Alert and a coalition of consumer and public health organizations and advocates sent a letter to Secretary Tommy Thompson asking him to support a World Health Organization initiative to curtail the marketing of junk food, and prevent obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. He did not respond.

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. For more information, see Commercial Alert's website at <<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.