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## Section B

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Policies Possible and Tried for Adults

# Acknowledgement

- Many of the principles outlined in this lecture are derived from the work of Eric A. Finkelstein and Laurie Zuckerman, authors of *The Fattening of America*.

# Outline

- Policy aimed at adults
- Policy aimed at children
- Private sector initiatives

# Policy Aimed at Adults

- Policies
  - Change farm subsidy policy
  - Food stamps
  - Medicare
  - Neighborhoods
  - Labeling
  - Fat tax
  
- Other issues
  - “McLawsuits”

# Farm Subsidy

- Farm subsidies shape what foods are produced
- These affect the relative prices of foods and make more processed foods cheaper
- Revisit farm subsidy policy

# Food Stamps

- Original policy was created based on equity concerns
- Debate has included
  - Limiting benefits
    - ▶ However this would put healthier foods even further out of reach
  - Allow cash instead
    - ▶ Likely will not lead to healthier choices
  - Limit the ability to use them for unhealthy foods
  - Provide incentives to purchase healthy ones—price discounts
  - Provide more nutrition education

# Medicare

- Should Medicare charge higher premiums to people of a less healthy weight?
  - Maybe, but what else would they charge for, and do we want to go down a path like that?
- Could fund more obesity reduction programs
  - However, these do not generally save money



# Neighborhoods

- Are they walkable?
- Should we change public policy to make them more walkable or to encourage people to move back to walkable neighborhoods?
- Would people actually walk?

# Labeling

- Do people pay attention?
  - Foods indicate nutrition now, but obesity has gone up
- There is a cost to labeling and a cost to monitoring labeling
- Even the FDA basically encouraged the market to sort things out

# McLawsuits

- People blame fast food companies for obesity
- As you may suspect by now, an economist would not be convinced
- Best public policy in the author's opinion would be to limit the ability to file frivolous lawsuits

# Fat Tax

- Would be complicated to implement a tax that could actually change obesity prevalence
- No obvious market failure to correct
- Not obvious what to tax when biggest problem is general increase in caloric intake
- May need to be a substantial tax and could increase the need for Food Stamps

# Fat Tax

- Is it fair that everyone (including normal weight) should have to pay the tax when normal weight individuals are already paying higher taxes for Medicaid and Medicare?
- Is there a compelling public need?
  - Only if it reversed a subsidy that made less healthy foods less expensive

# Children and Policy

- Stronger argument for children
- They are in the public charge anyway
- They are not given credit for being able to make informed decisions for themselves