



## The Daily Dish

# Making America Healthy Again

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | JANUARY 22, 2025

The nomination of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to be Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary has brought to the fore some very difficult issues. What is the relative importance of nutrition and lifestyle versus modern medical science to overall individual and societal health? Who is responsible for lifestyle and nutrition? The conservative notion that individual freedoms are paired with the responsibility of self-control and self-improvement seemingly has become a museum antique. Are we really going to make this the domain of government?

In the first of what will likely be many episodes of this sort, consider the proposed [legislation](#), the Healthy SNAP Act, that would ban spending food stamps on junk food. The bill's author said in a [statement](#):

*President Trump has been given a mandate by the majority of Americans to Make America Healthy Again, and those in his administration, like RFK Jr. and Senator Marco Rubio, have directly advocated for eliminating junk food purchases with SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program]. This legislation advances President Trump's agenda by ensuring that SNAP is used for nutritious foods, rather than junk foods and soda that contribute to long-term health issues.*

He went on to elaborate:

*If someone wants to buy junk food on their own dime, that's up to them. But what we're saying is, don't ask the taxpayer to pay for it and then also expect the taxpayer to pick up the tab for the resulting health consequences. As Oliver Anthony, in his viral song "[Rich Men North of Richmond](#)," said, "Taxes ought not to pay for your bags of fudge rounds." Americans know this is common sense!*

If good public policy was founded on raw emotion, this might have a chance. But there are two real problems in getting from “eat better” to the Healthy SNAP Act or any of a dozen other similar efforts. The first is that there is no such thing as a SNAP purchase versus a “my own dime” purchase. Money is fungible and if there is a prohibition on spending SNAP on junk, those purchases will come out of the other funds and the SNAP register tape will look as pure as the driven kale (or whatever). The bottom line is that such legislation may have exactly no impact on nutrition or health.

Second, the bill would give the HHS secretary the authority to identify other junk foods in addition to candy, dessert, and soft drinks. Put differently, the secretary would get to draw the line between junk and non-junk food. This is a nightmarish, anti-freedom, anti-DOGE, anti-common-sense notion. In short order, we’d be stuck with the HHS Center on M&M’s Analytics, which would be tasked with deciding whether trail mix with 21 M&M’s is junk, or if it takes 22. The lobbying efforts would be spectacular and soon legislation would be riddled with items like a “Twizzlers are not junk” carve-out in the HHS funding bill. You get the picture.