

Live Fat, Die Young: The Upside

Overheard one morning in a U.S. Senate cafeteria...

Lobbyist: Glad you could meet with me, Senator.

Senator: Not a problem, anything for one of my biggest campaign contributors. How are things at Majorfoods, Inc.?

Lobbyist: Fantastic! Profits are soaring. In fact, we just released a new product, the St'uffin[®]—a sugar-glazed, deep-fried, chocolate-chip-and-peanut-butter muffin. It's flying off the shelves! Here, try one.

Senator: Thanks. Mmmm, that is good. Now, what was it you wanted to discuss?

Lobbyist: Well, I may have the answer to the Social Security logjam.

Senator: Do tell.

Lobbyist: Everyone thinks that Social Security is running out of money, right? Well, that assumes Americans are going to live as long tomorrow as they do today. But according to a recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*—Americans' lives are now shorter by three months to a year because of obesity. And they'll soon lose another two to five years...

Senator: And you're saying this is a good thing?

Lobbyist: No, no, tragic. Absolutely tragic! Another St'uffin? But with average life-spans falling, Social Security will remain solvent for generations.

Senator: I see your point, but for some reason this seems wrong to me.

Lobbyist: I understand completely, Senator. It's easy to be swayed by the muckrakers who blame the food industry for making America fat. But we both know better than that. We live the good life here in America and some of us enjoy ourselves as fully as we can. Good drink, excellent food, magnificent desserts—these all increase our quality of life tremendously. But as with all things in life, some people overdo it a bit. Fortunately, Adam Smith is proven right again: the sum of individual Americans' decisions to enjoy themselves directly benefits the public good. Their choices will allow Social Security to thrive for many, many years.

Senator: Mm-hmm.

Lobbyist: Food producers, supermarkets, restaurants—all of these benefit the American economy. They provide needed goods and services, jobs, tax revenue. And they're doing their part to ensure the survival of Social Security as well!

Senator: Okay, I might not agree, but I see your point and the take-home message stays the same. No need to worry about Social Security reform, as it'll take care of itself. Good thing, too—this was taking up way too much time on the floor.

Lobbyist: Glad to help, Senator. One last thing: since you'll have a bit more time now, maybe you wouldn't mind pushing through that extension on sugar subsidies that we discussed at your last fundraising dinner?



Erik Assadourian, *Worldwatch* Staff Researcher

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