ES. to the NEWS

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GOVERNMENT-MANAGED HEALTH

Should personal health be a matter of individual choice or governmental decision? This is the fundamental question behind some of the most controversial issues now being bandied about in the legislatures, the bureaucracy, and the courts.

The Federal Government is using its mighty power to ban the use of saccharin, a substance used by scores of millions of people as a sugar-substitute for the purpose of controlling their sugar intake. Diabetics and obese persons consider saccharin essential to their health, and others use it to keep their weight down.

The cause of this governmental interference is that some tests indicate that a massive ingestion of saccharin in rats causes cancer. There is no such evidence on human beings.

At the same time, the government permits the sale and use of a substance on which there is a mountain of evidence that it does cause cancer in humans, namely, tobacco. Not only does the government not ban smoking, it spends tax dollars to subsidize tobacco growers. It is unlikely that the heaviest saccharin user could take in as much cancer-producing substance as a cigarette smoker.

For several years, cigarette packages and advertisements have been required to carry a notice that says: "Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health." At the very least, the notice should say: "Danger: Cigarette smoking kills through cancer, heart disease, and emphysema."

Likewise, the Federal Government does not enforce the Food and Drug law against whiskey. No warning of the harmful effects of alcohol is required on

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whiskey bottle labels or advertisements.

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Who is responsible for guiding children into making healthful choices and developing healthful habits? Parents, of course; but schools also used to be an influence for health.

I still have a rhym,ing alphabet of good health taught to me in the first grade of pub1 i c schoo1. Two of the verses are re1 evant here: "M is for mi1k, you need to drink plenty; but not tea or coffee before you are twenty Vis for vegetables -- spinach and peas, Potatoes and carrots -- eat plenty of these."

Sad to relate, many schools today are positively encouraging unhealthy habits by permitting junk food vending machines to be located in school corridors, locker rooms and gyms. This isn't because schools want children to be undernourished by satisfying their appetites with candy, soda, or other vitaminless items. It's just that the schools get a percentage of the profit and want to spend it on "extras" such as band uniforms and sports.

On the other hand, neither the schools nor the government has ever taken action against companies that sell products advertised as body-building cereals but which actually contain forty percent sugar. It remained for a coalition of private individuals to file a billion-dollar lawsuit charging that such "breakfast cereals" are really candy that is turning children into "sugar junkies."

The swine flu fiasco is a good example of why we can't count on the government to make wiser health decisions than individuals. Last year the government spent $135 million to try to vaccinate our entire population against a swine flu epidemic that never occurred. Now, according to the General Account ing Office, the government is faced with paying legal claims of up to $1 billion for deaths and injuries resulting from the vaccinations of persons who took the government's advice.

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