Bad Food in School Cafeterias

**By**[**THE EDITORIAL BOARD**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/opinion/editorialboard.html)JUNE 1, 2014

Republicans on a powerful House committee have balked at requiring all schools to serve healthy lunches in the coming school year. The action drew a well-deserved rebuke from the first lady, Michelle Obama, who has focused public attention on combating obesity among young people through exercise and better nutrition. Let’s hope the Senate holds out against such inanity.

On Thursday, the House Appropriations Committee [approved](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/us/politics/house-committee-votes-to-allow-schools-to-opt-out-of-nutritional-program.html) an agriculture spending bill that would allow many schools to postpone meeting nutritional guidelines for the federally subsidized lunch programs that provide free or low-cost meals to more than 30 million students. Under guidelines [published in January 2012](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/us/politics/new-school-lunch-rules-aimed-at-reducing-obesity.html), school lunches are to include more fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and less sodium.

Only a decade ago there was bipartisan support for healthier school lunches, but now many Republicans deplore what they see as government bureaucrats’ dictating food choices, driving up the cost of a cafeteria meal and offending personal preferences for certain junk foods.

The guidelines are not all that difficult to meet; [90 percent](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2014/05/0098.xml&contentidonly=true) of the nation’s schools have been able to do so. But critics argue that fresh produce costs more and that many students simply toss the healthier meals into the trash. The Agriculture Department says that the longstanding problem of wasted food has nothing to do with the nutrition standards and that only 0.15 percent of the schools (mostly in small districts) have dropped out of the program because of the new rules.

The House committee approved language that would require states to grant a waiver from the healthy food standards for the next school year to any school district that “verifies a net loss from operating a food service program” for a six-month period.

States must guard against a district’s use of accounting tricks designed to create losses, and Congress must resist any push to make the waivers permanent or to weaken the guidelines.

A version of this editorial appears in print on June 2, 2014, on page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Bad Food in School Cafeterias. [Order Reprints](https://s100.copyright.com/AppDispatchServlet?contentID=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2014%2F06%2F02%2Fopinion%2Fbad-food-in-school-cafeterias.html&publisherName=The+New+York+Times&publication=nytimes.com&token=&orderBeanReset=true&postType=&wordCount=315&title=Bad+Food+in+School+Cafeterias&publicationDate=June+1%2C+2014&author=By%20The%20Editorial%20Board)|[Today'sPaper](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/todayspaper/index.html)|[Subscribe](http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/Multiproduct/lp5558.html)

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A Vote on Medical Marijuana

**By**[**THE EDITORIAL BOARD**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/opinion/editorialboard.html)JUNE 1, 2014

The New York State Assembly easily [approved a law](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/nyregion/assembly-backs-use-of-marijuana-for-illnesses.html) legalizing medical marijuana last Tuesday, and there appear to be enough votes to pass similar legislation in the State Senate if that chamber’s leaders agree to allow a vote. They ought to do so before the legislative session ends on June 19. The bills would make the drug available, under tight regulation, to patients who, in many cases, do not get relief from other medications.

The Assembly bill, passed on a 91-to-34 vote, would allow the possession and use of up to two and a half ounces of marijuana by patients certified as seriously ill. It would permit dispensaries to deliver the drug to registered users and their caregivers in a system designed to prevent abuse or illegal uses of the drug.

A Senate version of the measure, sponsored by Diane Savino, a Staten Island Democrat, was recently approved by the Senate Health Committee. It bans homegrown marijuana and allows up to 20 manufacturers to grow marijuana indoors under tight security to prevent diversion to illegal uses. It lists 20 specific conditions, including cancer and AIDS, that would be eligible for treatment with medical marijuana, and it requires that prescriptions be written by doctors, physician assistants or nurse practitioners who certify that the patient has a serious condition, will be under their care and will likely benefit from medical marijuana. It also prohibits the smoking of medical marijuana by anyone under 21, although the drug could be prescribed to younger patients in other forms, such as edible products infused with marijuana.

Critics of the bills have expressed concern that smoking marijuana, which has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, may carry health hazards. Some have also suggested that the Legislature wait for the results of a more limited pilot program announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in January. That plan would restrict distribution to 20 hospitals and use strains of marijuana that might not be best for many patients.

The next hurdle is the Senate Finance Committee, where prospects are uncertain. Ms. Savino says 39 senators have told her they will vote for her bill if it reaches the floor, more than the 32 votes needed for passage. The bill has wide support from medical groups and patient advocates, and polls show that a large majority of New Yorkers support medical marijuana. It is time for Senate leaders to allow a vote.

Dealing WithBoko Haram

**By**[**THE EDITORIAL BOARD**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/opinion/editorialboard.html)MAY 30, 2014

It has been more than six weeks since [nearly 300](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/world/africa/west-african-nations-set-aside-their-old-suspicions-to-combat-boko-haram.html?action=click&module=Search&region=searchResults&mabReward=relbias&) schoolgirls were kidnapped by the Boko Haram extremist group in Nigeria. The militants have spent the last five years wreaking havoc and killing civilians — about 4,000 have died — in the northeastern section of the country. But it took a horrifying mass abduction to touch hearts around the world and persuade Nigeria — whose president, Goodluck Jonathan, initially rejected outside help — to join with other countries to try to find them.

The United States has sent about [30 specialists](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/world/africa/us-sends-troops-to-aid-hunt-for-nigerian-schoolgirls.html?action=click&module=Search&region=searchResults&mabReward=relbias&) from the State Department, the F.B.I. and the Pentagon with medical, intelligence counterterrorism and communications skills to advise Nigerian officials. It has been flying manned and unmanned surveillance aircraft over the heavily forested northeastern region of Nigeria where intelligence officials believe the girls are held. And last week, about [80 armed American troops](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/world/africa/us-sends-troops-to-aid-hunt-for-nigerian-schoolgirls.html?hpw&rref=world&action=click&module=Search&region=searchResults&mabReward=relbias&) were sent to Chad, where Predator surveillance drones will be operated from a large air base near N’Djamena.

France, which has taken a lead in the fight against militant groups in Mali and the Central African Republic, is helping, as are Britain, Canada and[Israel](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/24/world/africa/nigerias-army-holding-up-hunt-for-taken-girls.html?action=click&module=Search&region=searchResults&mabReward=relbias&). On the regional front, five West African countries — Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Benin — have agreed despite longstanding differences to share intelligence and strengthen military cooperation.

The militants, who easily traverse porous regional borders, have displaced close to half a million people and destroyed hundreds of schools in a wave of terror aimed at establishing an Islamic state in one of Nigeria’s poorest regions. A committee of the United Nations Security Council recently put Boko Haram on the[sanctions](http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/05/22/un-security-council-approves-sanctions-against-boko-haram-us-says/) list in an effort to cut off funding.

Despite the current emergency, it would be unrealistic to expect America, or any foreign nation, to come to the rescue every time there is a problem like this. Every state is responsible for its own citizens’ safety. On this score, Nigeria’s record is abysmal. Corruption is pervasive, and citizens rightly complain that they have not shared in the nation’s considerable oil wealth.

In many parts of the country, the government cannot provide security, good roads, water, health, reliable power and education. The problems are especially acute in the [mostly Muslim](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/29/us-nigeria-kidnap-missteps-idUSKBN0E916320140529) northeast. The army, accused of human rights abuses and starved of essential resources, is itself a threat to stability. A top defense official on Tuesday claimed that the [military knew](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/28/nigeria-violence-idUSL6N0OE52E20140528)where the girls were but did not plan a rescue effort out of fear for their safety.

A military response is only part of the answer. Mr. Jonathan’s government has to attack the root causes of disaffection by reducing corruption; reforming the police and army; and providing jobs, schools and other vital services for all of Nigeria’s citizens.