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**REMARKS BY U.S. SENATOR TOM HARKIN (D-IA)
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

"Thank you, Burtch, for that generous introduction. It's good to see Jerry Hadenfeldt, director of government relations with Meredith Corp. in Des Moines. In addition to Burtch, I'd like to thank Bob Liodice and Wally Snyder for your kind invitation to meet with you this morning.

"This invitation speaks volumes about your industry. It tells me that you are interested in genuine dialogue and a good-faith exchange of views - even where we have honest disagreements. In Washington, today, that kind of openness is in very short supply. So I am grateful to you.

"That said, as I was driving here, I couldn't help but recall Mark Twain's story about the missionary who went among the cannibals to convert them to his faith. As Twain told it: 'They listened with great interest to everything the missionary had to say. And then they *ate* him.' I trust that you folks have already had a good breakfast!

"The fact is, politicians and advertisers have a lot in common. We both operate in intensely competitive environments. We both live or die by our ability to sell, to persuade, to shape public opinion and personal choices. Here, this morning, I appreciate that I'm surrounded by master communicators and persuaders. . . some of the most creative minds in America.

"While political leaders have the persuasion of power, you folks have the power of persuasion. That's real power, with *enormous* consequences for our economy and society. And power - whether yours or mine - must be tempered with responsibility and restraint. Let me be clear: When it comes to the advertising and marketing of food to children, it is still my hope that real restraint will come from *within* your industry. . . obviating the need for further federal regulation.

"Today, the United States is confronted with a problem - only it's no longer just a problem, it is a public health crisis of the first order. We are in the midst of an epidemic of childhood obesity that is growing at a rapid pace. Some 15 percent of American children and teenagers are obese, a higher rate than in any other industrialized country. As a consequence, rates of obesity-related diseases such as adult-onset diabetes - which used to be unheard of in young people - are skyrocketing.

"Childhood obesity is a gateway to an entire lifetime of chronic illness and, eventually, premature death. Today's young and more overweight generation could very well become the first generation in American history to have a shorter lifespan than the one that preceded it.

"This is a huge wakeup call - as if we needed yet another one. We've already had major warnings about childhood obesity from the Surgeon General, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from the National Institutes of Health, from the Institute of Medicine, and on and on. The alarms are going off, one after another. Yet, we keep hitting the snooze button.

"A key question is: What is causing this epidemic? Many people attribute it largely to changing nutrition patterns - more calories, more junk food. Others say, 'No, the cause is a dramatic decline in physical activity.' This is a pointless debate. I mean, do we really need a Harvard study to tell us the obvious: the childhood obesity epidemic is being caused by *both*: sedentary lifestyles *and* bad nutrition.

"For years, I have been speaking out about the fact that our kids have fewer and fewer opportunities for physical activity. We are building subdivisions without sidewalks, and even some elementary schools without playgrounds. Teenagers spend, on average, 6 ½ hours a day sitting in front of TVs, video games, computers and movies. *Of course* this is contributing to childhood obesity!

"Likewise, it is absurd to deny that bad nutrition is also a major factor. Since the late 1970s, per capita dietary intake in the U.S. has increased by some 200 calories a day. Portion sizes have increased dramatically. High calorie/low nutrition food is more readily available - including in our public schools.

"Why are children consuming more calories and more foods high in sugar, fat, and salt? Again, we don't need a Harvard study to tell us the answer. Kids are eating more junk food for at least three reasons: One, because it tastes good. Two, because it is available *everywhere* - including, as I said, in schools. And three, because it is being aggressively advertised and marketed.

"Corporate America doesn't spend \$12 billion a year on advertising aimed at children because it likes to waste money. No. It spends \$12 billion *because that advertising works brilliantly*. . . . because it persuades children to demand - to the point of throwing temper tantrums, if necessary - a regular diet of candy, cookies, sugary cereal, sodas, and all manner of junk food.

"My friends, it's not my job to assess blame or to send anyone on a guilt trip. But I do not flinch from assigning responsibility. Elected officials, government, the food and advertising industries, schools, parents - we *all* have a responsibility to wake up and confront the childhood obesity epidemic. Denial is no longer an option - not for any of us.

"Obesity is a complex problem, and there is no one, simple solution. That's why I have introduced comprehensive legislation -- the Healthier Lifestyles and Prevention Act. My aim is to give communities, employers, schools, and individuals the tools they need to prevent obesity and promote wellness.

"Right now, we don't have a health care system in America, we have a sick care system. We wait until people get sick, obese, or disabled, and then we spend hundreds of billions of dollars to try to pick up the pieces. This is unwise. It is uneconomic. And, as we now know, it is totally unsustainable.

"The alternative - which I am promoting with my legislation - is to create a genuine *health* care system . . . a system that focuses on wellness and disease prevention . . . a system that keeps people out of the hospital in the first place.

"But - specifically with regard to childhood obesity - let me be clear that the issue before us is government responsibility and corporate responsibility. The First Amendment permits all kinds of irresponsible, inflammatory, and hurtful speech. We allow this as a necessary evil of living in a free society. But that doesn't mean that such speech is right or responsible. And there are circumstances where government rightly regulates speech, including advertising. We regulate ads differently for kids than we do for adults. In fact, we are more lax in how we look at advertising targeted to kids. I do not think that is right.

"Nor is the issue, here, individual responsibility. I believe just as strongly in individual responsibility as anyone in this room - as long as we're talking about adults. But it is entirely different when we are talking about children.

"Young kids are totally vulnerable and exploitable. Studies show that children do not understand that commercials are designed to sell products, because they don't yet possess the cognitive ability to evaluate advertising. It's not until age 7 or 8 that children even begin to distinguish between the show they are watching and the commercials that are trying to sell them something. So it is nonsensical to say that young kids have a personal responsibility to resist the lures of junk-food advertising. They can't -- and they don't - with disastrous consequences.

"OK, so what about parental responsibility? No question, many parents need to make better choices for their children. But there are practical limits on what we can expect. It is just not realistic to think that most parents are going to deny their children access to TV on Saturday morning and after school. And, for goodness sake, why do we have a situation where conscientious parents have to *protect* their children from the ads on Saturday morning TV?

"Do you know what parents tell me? They come up to me in airports or shopping malls. And they tell me that they are angry . . . they feel that their parental authority is being undermined by the sheer pervasiveness of junk-food advertising and marketing to their kids.

"Not even schools are safe havens anymore. There is Channel One, with ads for candy bars and sugary sodas. There are giant Coke machines that double as billboards, right in the school hallway or cafeteria.

"A senior brand manager at Heinz was quoted in the Wall Street Journal. He said: 'All of our advertising is targeted to kids. You want that nag factor so that seven-year-old Sarah is nagging mom in the grocery store to buy funky purple. We're not sure mom would reach out for it on her own.'

"My friends, this is probably not news to you, but moms and dads across America know *exactly* what's going on. For them, the harassment factor is bad enough. But now they are reading in Time and Newsweek that junk food is contributing to an obesity epidemic and endangering their children's health.

"For parents I talk to, this is the last straw. A backlash is brewing. A Wall Street Journal poll in February found that 68 percent of American adults believe that advertising to kids is a major contributor to the rising tide of obesity in children. In the same poll, a clear majority said government should do more to regulate food ads directed at children.

"As I said, it is still my hope that real restraint will come from *within* your industry. CARU has done some good things. And CARU is an *acknowledgement* by the advertising industry that irresponsible food marketing to children is a very real problem. But CARU is not cutting it. It has no legal authority - and it has no teeth.

"So I have come here, this morning, to do some direct marketing of my own. I am appealing to you to heed the excellent recommendation of the Institute of Medicine: Sit down with the food and broadcasting industries, and hammer out tough, rigorous, age-appropriate standards to govern the marketing of junk food to children. And create an enforcement body that has independence and teeth.

"Some will advise you to stonewall this request. They say that Corporate America's job is to move product, maximize profits, and reward shareholders. They say that as long as no laws are being broken, then anything goes. In other words, it's all about the almighty dollar.

"I don't buy that. I don't believe that *you* buy that. I am confident that you are moral, responsible people. You are parents and grandparents who care deeply about the wellbeing not just of your children, but of *other people's* children. You wouldn't want *your* child being encouraged to buy a 20-ounce soda in school - with 15 teaspoons of sugar. You wouldn't want *anyone's* child to be encouraged to buy that soda.

"The problem is that in the current, anything-goes environment, you can't afford to act responsibly. If your competitors are aggressively marketing junk food to young kids, then you have to, as well. It's a race to the bottom. And I strongly suspect that many of you are looking for a way to stop that race.

"Well, there are two ways to accomplish this: There is restraint from *within*. Or there is restraint from *without*. The choice is largely up to you. But, I can tell you -- based on my own conversations with parents and with other members of Congress -- patience is running out.

"Late in her life, Jackie Kennedy said a very wise thing. She said that 'If you botch raising your children, nothing else you do in life matters very much.' I fear that, in so many respects, we are botching the raising of our children in the United States.

"We are exposing our kids to a barrage of messages and influences that are just plain toxic - not just unhealthy foods, but ultra-violent video games and TV shows, sexual images in music

videos, and much more. We are exploiting our children. We are pouring acid on their innocence. And, very often, this is being done to make money.

"It's not just parental authority that is being trampled on. It's also the values and standards of a decent society.

"And we - each and every one of us - have a responsibility to reverse this destructive course. Yes, it is time for individual responsibility. But it is also time for government responsibility and corporate responsibility. And I am convinced that the advertising industry - with all your resourcefulness and creativity - can be a powerful force for change . . . and for doing good.

"So, again, I am deeply grateful for your invitation to speak, this morning. Dialogue is a good thing. And I look forward to continuing this conversation in the days and months ahead. Thank you, my friends."

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