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‘Complete Streets’ Bill to Combat Inactivity

Campaign Applauds Measure as Effective Tool in Reversing Obesity Epidemic

(Washington D.C.) Taking on a key culprit of the U.S. obesity epidemic—inactivity—Representatives Doris Matsui (D-CA) and Steven LaTourette (R-OH) Thursday introduced the Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2011. The measure, strongly supported by the Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund, promotes healthy and active lifestyles by ensuring new federally-funded transportation investments create safe routes for walking and biking.

“Research has shown that people who are physically active also live healthier lives and, consequently, endure lower health care costs,” said Stephanie Silverman, senior advisor to the Campaign Action Fund. “Conversely, if Americans don’t have the option to safely walk or bike to work or school, they’re more likely to be sedentary, and that’s an unacceptable missed opportunity for our nation’s health and our economy. The Safe and Complete Streets Act is to be commended for increasing opportunities for physical activity — a critical component in reversing the obesity epidemic.”

As rates of childhood obesity have steadily increased in recent years, so too have rates of inactivity. The Centers for Disease Control report that the prevalence of obesity among children aged 6 to 11 increased from 6.5 percent in 1980 to nearly 20 percent in 2008, and among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years, obesity increased from 5 percent to 18 percent. Meanwhile, the Safe Routes to School Partnership reports that, although approximately 50 percent of children walked or bicycled to school in 1969, fewer than 15 percent of schoolchildren walk or bike to school today. Additionally, children ages 8 to 18 today devote an average of more than 53 hours a week—seven hours and 38 minutes a day—to using entertainment media, according to a 2010 Kaiser Family Foundation report.

Currently, America faces \$168 billion in annual medical costs associated with obesity—more than twice what it was paying only a decade ago—and according to a recent McKinsey report, obesity-related medical costs could double again by 2018. For employers, \$73.1 billion per year is lost in lost productivity among full-time workers due to obesity—the equivalent of hiring 1.8 million new workers at the average American annual salary of \$42,000, according to a 2010 Duke University study.

Other important efforts to increase physical activity as a means of transportation are underway in the Senate. Senator Tom Harkin, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, recently introduced the Safe Routes to School Act (S. 800), a needed measure to continue and enhance the Safe Routes to School program.

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About the Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund

The Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund is dedicated to federal policy changes that can reverse one of America's costliest diseases. The Campaign convenes leaders from industry, academia, public health and associations to speak with one voice for measures to reverse the obesity epidemic and promote healthy weight in children and adults.