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Michelle Obama’s Unsavory  
School-Lunch Flop  
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The road to gastric hell is paved with first lady Michelle Obama’s nanny-state intentions. Don’t take my word for it. Schoolkids in Los Angeles have blown the whistle on the East Wing chef-in-chief’s healthy-lunch diktats. Get your Pepto-Bismol ready. The taste of government waste is indigestion-inducing.

According to a weekend report by the Los Angeles Times, the city’s “trailblazing introduction of healthful school lunches has been a flop.” In response to the public hectoring and financial inducement of Mrs. Obama’s federally subsidized anti-obesity campaign, the district dropped chicken nuggets, corn dogs, and flavored milk from the menu for “beef jambalaya, vegetable curry, pad Thai, lentil and brown rice cutlets, and quinoa and black-eyed pea salads.”

Sounds delectable in theory. But in practice, the initiative has been what L.A. Unified’s food-services director Dennis Barrett plainly concludes is a “disaster.” While the Obama administration has showered the nation’s second-largest school district with nutrition awards, thousands of students voted with their upset tummies and abandoned the program. A forbidden-food black market — stoked not just by students, but also by teachers — is now thriving. Moreover, “principals report massive waste, with unopened milk cartons and uneaten entrees being thrown away.”

This despite a massive increase in spending on nutritional improvements — from \$2 million to \$20 million alone over the last five years on fresh produce.

This despite a nearly half-billion-dollar budget shortfall and 3,000 layoffs earlier this year.

Earlier this spring, L.A. school officials acknowledged that the sprawling district is left with a whopping 21,000 uneaten meals a day, in part because the federal school-lunch program “sometimes requires more food to be served than a child wants to eat.” The leftovers will now be donated to nonprofit agencies. But after the recipients hear about students’ reports of moldy noodles, undercooked meat, and hard rice, one wonders how much of the “free” food will go down the hatch — or down the drain. Ahhh, savor the flavor of one-size-fits-all mandates.

There’s nothing wrong with encouraging our children to eat healthier, of course. There’s nothing wrong with well-run, locally based, and parent-driven efforts. But as I’ve noted before, the federal foodie cops care much less about students’ waistlines than they do about boosting government and public-union payrolls.

In a little-noticed announcement several months ago, Obama health officials declared their intention to use school-lunch applications to boost government health-care rolls. Never mind the privacy concerns of parents.

Big Government programs "for the children" are never about the children. If they were, you wouldn't see Chicago public-school officials banning students from bringing home-packed meals made by their own parents. In April, the Chicago Tribune reported that "unless they have a medical excuse, they must eat the food served in the cafeteria." The bottom line? Banning homemade lunches means a fatter payday for the school and its food provider.

Remember: The unwritten mantra driving Mrs. Obama's federal school-lunch meddling and expansion is: "Cede the children, feed the state." And the biggest beneficiaries of her efforts over the past three years have been her husband's deep-pocketed pals at the Service Employees International Union. There are 400,000 workers who prepare and serve lunch to American schoolchildren. SEIU represents tens of thousands of those workers and is trying to unionize many more at all costs.

In L.A., the district's cafeteria fund is \$20 million in the hole thanks to political finagling by SEIU Local 99. The union's left-wing allies on the school board and in the mayor's office pressured the district to adopt reckless fiscal policies awarding gold-plated health benefits to part-time cafeteria workers in the name of "social justice." As one school-board member who opposed the budget-busting entitlements said: "Everyone in this country deserves health benefits. But it was a very expensive proposal. And it wasn't done at the bargaining table, which is where health benefits are usually negotiated. And no one had any idea where the money was going to come from."

Early next year, Mrs. Obama will use the "success" of her child-nutrition campaign to hawk a new tome and lobby for more money and power in concert with her husband's reelection campaign. It's a recipe for more half-baked progressivism served with a side order of bitter arugula.