

### **MR. BUREAUCRAT, MAY I PLEASE HAVE SOME CATFISH AND HUSHPUPPIES?**

There is a report out saying that Southerners are fatter than most folks. The Trust for America's Health claims that eight of the 10 states with the porkiest people are located in the South. Jeff Levi, the group's executive director, is quoted as saying that he is stumped as to why Southerners get fatter than the rest of the country. He says it could involve "socio-economic" and "cultural" factors.

You need to know right off that Dr. Levi graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio and from Dartmouth and most likely doesn't know a Moon Pie from a moonbeam. The reason that we are fatter than everybody else is that our food is better, and because it is better, we eat a lot of it. Duh!

Southerners can cook rings around anybody north of the Mason-Dixon Line, and west of New Orleans. Our family matriarch, Aunt Callie, could fry a bucket of mud and have everybody begging for seconds. Cack, as we called her, never saw a recipe book in her life. She just turned the stove up as high as it would go, threw lard and salt in the skillet and cooked the bejeezus out of whatever hit the pan, including fried chicken, country-fried steak, fried okra, fried green tomatoes and fried apple pies. And when we cleaned our plates, we had homemade chocolate cake and lots of sweet tea to wash it down. I guarantee Dr. Levi didn't eat like that at Oberlin or at Dartmouth. He probably had broccoli, asparagus and English peas and then finished off his meal with a tangerine. Good thing he never met Cack. No way he would be fretting over how fat Southerners are. He'd be too busy eating her buttered cornbread to care.

In case you haven't already gone to the refrigerator for some buttermilk, you might be interested to know that Georgia ranks 12th among fat states — not anything to brag about, particularly since we lag Mississippi and Alabama, two states that we see in our rearview mirror on about any measurement you care to make. The real embarrassment is that people in Michigan are bigger lard bottoms than we are. What in the world could people in Michigan be eating that is more fattening than peach cobbler? Maybe they deep-fry their cranberries.

Among several recommendations from the Washington pointy-heads in the fight on fat is for businesses to offer their workers "nutrition counseling." It makes me wonder if anybody at the Trust for America's Health has ever held a real job in the real world. ("Folks, we are getting our brains beat out by the competition. Our costs are up and our profits are down, but let's take a minute and talk about cucumbers.")

And, of course, the Trust for America's Health, like any of the innumerable special-interest groups that exist in Washington, thinks government needs to get more involved. Government involvement can justify their existence and make them a "player" inside the Beltway. The more laws they can get passed, the more influence they have. And the more meddling in our personal lives we have to endure. The last thing we need is a government nanny telling us what to eat. What business is it of government what I eat and whether I fry it or consume it raw? If these people get their way, we might have to get some bureaucrat's approval before we can scarf down our catfish and hushpuppies.

If our government can't keep illegal immigrants from coming and going across our borders, how are they going to keep some kid from eating a double cheeseburger with fries and a shake? If Momma and Daddy don't want their child looking like a walrus, can't they just utter the "no" word?

I have a wonderful solution to this problem. I think exercise is the answer. Therefore, I would suggest that Dr. Levi and his colleagues at the Trust for America's Health take a hike. As for me, I am going to exercise, too. I plan to exercise my right to continue to enjoy down-home Southern cooking. Pass the biscuits and gravy, please.