

February 4, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Throughout my career, I have advocated for the well-being of our children. One of the greatest threats to our children's future is the growing trend of childhood obesity. Unhealthy children often become unhealthy adults. Since 2003, I've led efforts to change government policies and to raise public awareness of the human and financial costs of obesity. As Comptroller, I am committed to ensuring that we have a healthy work force to support Texas' economic vitality and growth.

This report updates a 2007 Comptroller report outlining the cost of obesity to Texas businesses and provides strong recommendations to address the state's obesity crisis on all levels: in our schools, businesses and communities.

The number of Texans who are overweight or obese continues to grow, accounting for a significant jump in the costs borne by Texas employers. Today, 66.7 percent of adult Texans are overweight or obese, up from 64.1 percent in 2005.

The rising cost of treating obesity-related diseases and an aging population with higher rates of obesity also have increased the Comptroller's estimate of obesity costs to Texas businesses. Our updated estimates put obesity-related costs for Texas businesses at *\$9.5 billion in 2009*. Left unchecked, *obesity could cost employers \$32.5 billion annually by 2030*. These costs consume a growing share of economic output that could otherwise support more productive activities. Obesity-related costs also contribute to rising health care and insurance costs that have forced some Texas employers to reduce insurance coverage.

This is a battle we cannot afford to lose.

The importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is something I experience first-hand on my family ranch in West Texas. On the ranch, you have to be fit and healthy to survive. If your car breaks down or runs out of gas, you might have to walk 10 miles or more to the nearest farm for help.

The fight to curb obesity has important implications for all Texans, from their wallets to their personal health. The magnitude of the challenge requires an equally bold response. Our efforts will require us to consider and *challenge* the way we live, and the importance we place on a healthy lifestyle.

Sincerely,

Susan Combs

