



Michelle Obama promotes child health program in Las Vegas



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Paige Owens, left, 10, of Las Vegas gets a high-five from first lady Michelle Obama as they take part in an exercise activity Tuesday at the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid looks on at right. Obama, Reid, and Assistant Secretary of the Interior Rhea Suh kicked off the national "Let's Move Outside!" initiative that promotes outdoor physical activity for children and families.

By Erin Dostal (contact)

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Childhood obesity rates in the United States have tripled in the past 30 years.

That's something First Lady Michelle Obama hopes to reverse.

The first lady spoke alongside Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Rep. Dina Titus and Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary Rhea Suh on Tuesday at Red Rock Canyon to promote her Let's Move Outside! program, designed to motivate kids to become healthier and more active.

Obama emphasized that childhood obesity is strongly linked to health problems later in life, including diabetes, cancer and heart problems.

And because the U.S. spends about \$150 billion each year on obesity-related health problems, it's also an economic issue.

"If we don't act now, that number is just going to continue to go up," she said. "None of us want that kind of future for our kids."

Michelle Obama at Red Rock Canyon



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Photo 1/5

PERMALINK

CAPTION

FULLSCREEN

Reid said the main goal during the health care reform debate was bringing down the price of health care.

“Prevention is the key to bringing down health care costs,” he said.

Suh spoke about the value of public lands, including national and state parks, in fostering a more active generation of kids.

“You may not know this, but you own this. This is part of your backyard,” Suh said to the children seated at the back of the amphitheater at the Red Rock Visitors Center. “You own all of the public lands in this country.”

That amounts to millions of acres just in the Las Vegas area, she said.

“Doctors, teachers and other professionals all agree that outdoor activities are one of the easiest and most fun ways to stay fit,” she said.

Obama said her program will promote kids getting at least 60 minutes of activity each day.

“If adults here can just think back to when we were growing up, back then an hour of activity was nothing,” she said. “We didn’t call it activity. We called it play.”

Christine J. Spadafor, CEO of St. Jude’s Ranch for Children in Boulder City, said part of Obama’s message stuck out for her during the speech.

“When I was a child, on a Saturday, I would leave the house in the morning” and not return until dinner, she said, adding that she and her childhood friends grew up to be health-conscious adults.

“We were busy, busy little kids,” she said. “It’s a very different time.”

Nina Abram, a theater teacher at Mojave High School, said she has noticed a decline in her students’ health during her 17 years of teaching.

“I like the fact that it’s getting kids to be healthy,” she said. “How important it is for kids not to take their health for granted, even though they’re young.”

Because so many kids today spend their time being sedentary, such as playing video games, it’s no surprise obesity rates are so high, Obama said. That’s why action is needed, she said.

Access to affordable, healthy food is necessary, she said, as is encouraging kids to take advantage of free or cheap natural parks and spaces, like Red Rock Canyon.

“Activity doesn’t have to cost a thing,” Obama said.



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First lady Michelle Obama, center, gets a hug from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid as she is introduced to speak Tuesday at the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Assistant Secretary of the Interior Rhea Suh looks on at right. Obama, Reid, and Suh kicked off the national "Let's Move Outside!" initiative that promotes outdoor physical activity for children and families.