

Two Teaching Opportunities for Healthcare Reform in America:

**Sonia Sotomayor, US Supreme Court Judge (nominated)
Regina Benjamin, MD, Surgeon General (nominated)**

The choice of two sick and/or obese candidates for two highly visible and powerful US government positions has caused a national uproar. Considering all we know about effective diet-therapies, failure to fix their poor health now is inexcusable and risking our future.

The Prospects:

Sonia Sotomayor, a 54-year-old Hispanic overweight federal judge, with a history of type-1 diabetes since age 8 was nominated on May 26, 2009 for the U.S. Supreme Court.

On July 13, 2009 Regina Benjamin, a 52-year-old Black obese physician was picked to become the nation's family doctor—our 18th Surgeon General.

The Plan:

The public's reaction to the medical histories of these two women has been dismay. Undoubtedly, both are extraordinarily qualified in their respective fields and have the potential to make great contributions to our country. Their health problems are a potential Waterloo for each, or they could be an unprece-



Regina Benjamin, MD

Age 52, African-American

Born: October 26, 1956, Mobile, AL

Work: Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic in the fishing village of Bayou La Batre, Alabama. First African American woman on the American Medical Association's board of trustees. Past president of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

The Nation Worries about Sotomayor's Longevity

Appointments to the US Supreme Court are for life. Unfortunately (regardless of what the experts have told the press recently), the life expectancy of someone with type-1 diabetes is dramatically shortened (by about 10 years). These people also suffer more often from debilitating complications, such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, nerve damage, and blindness, than do people without diabetes. Because of her unhealthy diet, which is reflected by her overweight, premature death and complications should be expected for this Supreme Court judge. The most recent [analysis](#) using modern therapies found that after 30 years of type-1 diabetes 50% of people have eye disease (proliferative retinopathy), 25% have kidney disease (nephropathy) and 14% have cardiovascular disease. Judge Sotomayor has had her disease for 46 years; I have no doubt that she is already suffering from major organ damage from her diabetes and her diet. (She looks unhealthy even to the casual observer.)

Diabetics are metabolically handicapped people, hampered in their ability to defend and repair themselves from outside injuries, like an infection or an unhealthy diet. Therefore, to help counteract this disadvantage, people with this disease must be cared for with extraordinary vigilance—and that means careful control of their blood sugars with insulin injections, a wholesome lifestyle, and most importantly, a health-supporting diet. Sonia Sotomayor still eats the high-fat, high-cholesterol Western [diet](#) that causes heart disease, strokes, kidney disease, etc. in hundreds of millions of people worldwide who do not have this handicap of type-1 diabetes. Obviously because of her physical limitations caused by damage to her pancreas as a child she is a greater risk than the average person of rapid bodily deterioration.

By changing to a low fat, no-cholesterol, starch-based diet, type-1 diabetics have a real chance of avoiding premature death and serious complications. The only people I have met with long-standing type-1 diabetes who still have all their parts working after 40 years of disease, have been those following a low-fat nearly vegetarian diet—the best example I know is of the few fortunate people who learned and practiced the Kempner Rice Diet from Duke University—oftentimes they remained in great shape for as long as 50 years following their diagnosis because of their very low-fat diet of primarily rice, fruits and vegetables.

Sonia Sotomayor's diabetes interferes with her daily duties as a judge. She must test her sugars and administer insulin multiple times throughout the day. Bouts of confusion and accidents occur commonly from hypoglycemic reactions in most type-1 diabetics, especially those who try to intensively treat their disease. My experience has been that a change to the McDougall Diet results in more stable blood sugars throughout the day and at least a one-third reduction in insulin requirements. (Type-1 diabetics will always require some insulin.) Most important, what the judge needs to know is that this is not an irreversible sentence—she can get out of jail; that a significant amount of the long-term damage to the eyes, the kidneys, and the blood vessels to the heart and brain can be reversed with a change in diet.

And she will look and feel better as soon as she makes the change.

In 1927 Dr. E. P. Joslin, founder of the famous Joslin Diabetic Center in Boston, suspected a high-fat, high-cholesterol diet might favor the development of diabetes and its major complication, atherosclerosis. He prophetically wrote: "I believe the chief cause of premature atherosclerosis in diabetes, save for advancing age, is an excess of fat, an excess of fat in the body (obesity), an excess of fat in the diet, and an excess of fat in the blood. With an excess of fat diabetes begins and from an excess of fat diabetics die, formerly of coma, recently of atherosclerosis." And now, 82 years after Joslin's far-sighted message, diabetes is the fastest growing disease in the world.

Ref: Joslin EP. Atherosclerosis and diabetes. *Ann Clin Med* 1927; 5:1061.

The Nation's Anguish over Dr. Benjamin's Appearance

Since Dr. Regina Benjamin's selection, one negative comment has been emphasized over all of her other qualifications: her obesity. People are asking, "How is she to impact the nation's health if she can't even take care of herself?"

Some supporters point out that being overweight actually qualifies her for the job because she has more empathy for the obesity epidemic than a trim person would. Most comments have, however, not been so supportive. On the Fox Business Network, the Neal Cavuto show, a guest said, "Dr. Benjamin is 50 pounds overweight, she is obese...she is a size 20...The Surgeon General is a symbolic position...Would you then want your head of the Federal Reserve be a guy that lives in a cardboard box underneath the highway because he understands the plight of poor people?...Would you want Michael Jackson's doctors to be in charge of drug control of the DEA?...If (you are going to be Surgeon General) you should [look the part...](#)"

The example of the Federal Reserve guy is one of a lifetime of lack of education and opportunity, and the DEA example is one of moral depravity. These problems are largely unfixable. Dr. Benjamin's obesity problem is a simple misunderstanding about which foods to choose and this wrong thinking can be fixed instantaneously—or at least in 10 days at the McDougall Program.

Let's Make This a Racial Matter

Medicine and health remain the last bastions of broad segregation in the US.

Obesity Rates in Various States in the US:

Blacks: 23 to 45.1%

Hispanics: 21 to 36.7%.

Whites: 9 to 30.2%

In general, Blacks are considerably more often, and Hispanics are a little more often, fatter and sicker than are Whites. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, on average; Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians and Alaska Natives are [more likely](#) (1.6 to 2.3 times as likely) to have diabetes than non-Hispanic Whites. Compared with Whites, Blacks experience substantial excess mortality from cancer, cardiovascular disease, and infant death. Hispanics still have less heart disease than Whites.

Making health a matter of racial pride could turn the tables. Not long ago, because of widespread poverty, Black and Hispanic people followed simple diets—they could only afford starch-based meals, with

little meat, dairy, and processed foods. By no coincidence, Blacks and Hispanics were typically trim and healthy back then, too. With the better job opportunities and an improved overall economy, these two subgroups have been able to eat like kings and queens, and it shows. Most people can remember a past generation when people were healthier. Sotomayor's parents emigrated from Puerto Rico during World War II. The traditional diet then was based on corn, beans, and rice. As a US territory, the local diet has become very rich and the people are now in trouble like most other Americans.

As a young doctor working in Hawaii with people of Hawaiian, Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese descent I made great efforts to personalize the diet-health connection. My third and fourth generation patients were sick due to the rich foods they consumed. I would ask them if they knew why they suffered with obesity, type-2 diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and cancer. Then I would ask them if grandma and grandpa were still alive, how was their health, and what did they eat. Commonly the answer was: "Grandma and grandpa are in their nineties, working hard every day, trim, and eating poi or rice." Then I would comment, "The reason you are not in the same shape is that you have abandoned your family's traditional foods. Look what the White man's diet has done to you." Common illnesses are not genetic. But, they certainly have become racial.

Besides being fatter and sicker, Blacks, Hispanics and minorities receive lower-quality health care; even when members have the same incomes, insurance coverage, and medical conditions as Whites, they receive [worse care](#).

Give the World a Demo

I am so confident in the effects of the education we provide at the McDougall Program that all I ask is for these two unhealthy representatives of the United States to attend the lectures, eat the foods served "all you can eat buffet-style," and let us measure the results as we usually do—body weights, blood pressures, and a few simple blood tests. I will challenge both women, as I do many other participants, to "overeate" if you wish during the program, in an effort to prove me wrong (no outside food allowed). In 10 days with TV, radio, and newspaper reporters looking in, the world will see beyond any doubt that the growing epidemic of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer worldwide is due to what people eat, not how much they eat—and more important, serious diseases can be cured by a simple change. Being overweight and sick are not matters of intelligence, gender, genetics, or race. Judge Sotomayor and Dr. Benjamin right now have a teaching opportunity to prove to the world, it's the food!