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## Obesity in America

In the past week, I've been in three situations that have given me cause to think about a crisis plaguing America—obesity. This past week I've had more than my share of fat people. I'm not talking about the chunky people who could lose a few pounds. I'm talking about the really obese people. You know, the ones you see and think to yourself, "Damn, put down the fork, fat ass." You know, the ones who have more rolls than your local bakery. Now, don't get me wrong. I know a lot of overweight and obese people, and I'm not trying to say that they're not good people. In fact, they're some of the best people I know, and they can live their life however they want. But there comes a point that when their obesity is encroaching on me that I have a serious problem with it.

First, on the plane, I get stuck next to an obese woman. As you may know, the seats in first class are significantly wider than those in coach. Didn't matter in this case. She comes waddling in and plops down in her chair next to me and her fat starts to encroach over the arm rest into my personal space. So, now I don't have one arm rest, and it's going to be virtually impossible to get up if I have to go to the lavatory. And I guess the worst part is that she smelled. I know that you know exactly what I'm referring to. These very obese people have a problem with personal hygiene. Now, my issue is that the airline didn't make her purchase two seats. Their argument is that the seats are wider in first class so she didn't have to. I guess that reminds me exactly why I don't generally fly commercial. I guess I need to get a bigger jet of my own for the longer flights.

Second, I went to a live WWE pay-per-view event in Raleigh. It was Over the Limit. Everyone's there to have a good time, including me. Well, it was just my luck that the obese man had the chair next to me. Unfortunately, the chair there at ringside was just a standard chair, not an extra wide one like on the plane, so he's immediately violating my personal space. Here's someone that should have had at least two if not three chairs to accommodate



himself. I got to talking to him, and he was a very pleasant individual. I don't think he really realized he was inconveniencing me, but he was. I let it go and tried to have a good time, but it's quite uncomfortable when you've got someone virtually pushing you out of your own seat toward the person next to you. Oh, and he did smell as well.

Finally, I was walking around EPCOT at Walt Disney World in Orlando, enjoying the Flower and Garden Festival. You would not believe the number of obese people who were there. I'm talking kids, adults, old folks. The kids are waddling around shoving their faces with junk food and sucking up sodas. The adults are gorging themselves with food and sodas. It's a horrible display of human behavior and health or lifestyle. But what really got me about this was that most of them were riding around in their little scooters. They're too damn fat and lazy to walk! So, they're riding around forcing their way through a crowd with their scooters and running into people. Really people? Put down the fork, get off your fat ass, and walk. Get some exercise for a change.

But I got to thinking and I realized that the imposition of obese people doesn't end with their physical presence. There's much more to it. The 36% of the US population that is obese cost all the rest of us (who are not obese) financially. That's right. They cost each and every one of us to the tune of about \$150 billion annually in healthcare costs. Most of this cost to treat obesity related health issues is borne by Medicare and Medicaid. And who pays for that? Each and every worker and taxpayer. And how about these facts from researchers at RTI International, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Obesity is responsible for 9.1% of annual medical costs.



- The medical costs for an obese person are 42% higher than for persons of normal weight. This equates to an additional \$1,429 per year in healthcare costs.
- Medicare prescription drug payments for obese recipients are about \$600 per year higher than for normal weight recipients.
- Obesity accounts for 8.5% of Medicare expenditure and 11.8% of Medicaid expenditure and 12.9% of private insurance expenditure.

And guess what? Obesity contributes to higher health insurance premiums for me and you, even though we're not overweight. How is that possible? Private health insurers base rates on statistics from mortality tables including age, gender, location and smoking habits. Weight may or may not be a factor in determining the premium you pay, especially if you're part of a group policy! So, if you're of average weight, you may be paying the same premium as someone who weighs over 300 pounds! Thus, when your insurance company has disproportionate payouts for obese individuals and treating their health issues (diabetes, heart disease, etc.), you get to share the financial burden. Higher outlays for the insurance company equals higher premiums for everyone.

What's the solution? Simple. Better diet and exercise. As a society, we're eating way too many processed foods and fast food. We're eating larger portions, and we're not getting any exercise. Cut out the high sugar foods and junk food. Replace one soda per day with a glass of water. Get a little exercise. You don't have to run a marathon or anything, but do something. Don't just sit around and play video games. Take a walk. It's easy. Put down the fork and get up off your ass.

**About Mr. Cartwright**— Digger Cartwright is the author of several mystery stories, teleplays, and novels including *The Versailles Conspiracy*, a modern day political thriller, *Murder at the Ocean Forest*, a traditional mystery novel set



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in the 1940s, and *The House of Dark Shadows*, a psychological thriller.

Mr. Cartwright is also a noted industrialist and investor with interests ranging from shipping, oil exploration, sports entertainment, hospitality and tourism, and gaming. In the business realm, he has contributed to a number of articles on a wide range of financial, strategic planning, and policy topics and is a contributor to several finance/economic books. He frequently contributes articles, commentaries, and editorials focusing on current economic and political topics for the private think tank, Thinking Outside the Boxe.

Mr. Cartwright's philanthropic efforts include contributions to a wide range of causes, predominantly at the local level. Mr. Cartwright is an enthusiastic supporter of local [no-kill animal shelters](#) and [humane societies](#), the [Wounded Warrior Project](#), and local [Meals on Wheels programs](#).

He enjoys golf, participating in charity golf tournaments, falconry, and attending WWE events. He divides his time between Washington, D.C., South Carolina, and Florida.