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## **STAPLES: KEEP “MEATLESS MONDAYS” CAMPAIGN OUT OF SCHOOLS**

By Todd Staples - Special to the American-Statesman

Texas children are back at school, and while our schools are keenly focused on educating young minds, that doesn't mean parents don't face certain anxieties when seeing a child leave for class. One typical worry is whether kids are receiving the proper care during their time at school.

Recently, I learned some Texas school districts, such as Dripping Springs ISD, have adopted a policy deemed “Meatless Mondays” for some of their campuses. These actions have me very concerned.

Restricting children's meal choice to not include meat is irresponsible and has no place in our schools. This activist movement called “Meatless Mondays” is a carefully-orchestrated campaign that seeks to eliminate meat from Americans' diets seven days a week — starting with Mondays.

For those Texans who choose not to eat meat, I say more power to you. If you want to take the personal challenge to go meatless on Mondays, go right ahead. However, we cannot force such an agenda-driven diet on anyone who has not chosen such a diet — especially our school children.

Meat is a critical part of a balanced diet, and provides us with high-quality proteins and essential amino acids. It bothers me when a particular group tries to convince the public that meat consumption is unhealthy and environmentally unfriendly. Worse still are the activists behind the campaign who have been tied to anti-animal agriculture campaigns.

School meals are made and served to children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. It is important to remember that for many underprivileged children the meals they eat at school often represents their best meals of the day. To deprive them of a meat-based protein during school lunch is most likely depriving them of their only source of protein for the day.

While we have plenty of room in the Lone Star State for vegetarians, we have no room for activists who seek to mandate their lifestyles on others. I have the solution for schools looking for a way to accommodate individuals who want meatless options: Give THEM meatless options, and do NOT force all kids to consume meatless meals. School must remain a neutral zone free of agenda-driven propaganda. Let's give Texas school children healthy choices, and let them decide.

Need I remind Texas schools of another ugly fight over agenda-driven propaganda? Remember CSCOPE? Let's get the propaganda out of Texas schools.

*Staples is the Texas Commissioner of Agriculture and is serving his second term in office.*