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America's Tall Order

John R. Kasich, the Ohio Republican who last week became the latest from his party to occupy the catbird seat in the House of Representatives, said his "revolutionary" plan to cut back social spending is a break for America's children, who as matters now stand are likely to be stuck with the bill for today's budgetary excesses. Americans will acquiesce in these cuts, he said, because "mothers and fathers will do virtually anything for their children."

That, sir, is gospel truth. "Virtually anything" isn't just whistling "Dixie," as was proved on the front page of this newspaper on the very day Kasich spoke. While Republicans were congratulating American parents for their willingness to chop the federal budget into coleslaw in order to make tomorrow safe for Dick and Jane, The Washington Post was reporting that those same parents are eagerly resorting to artificial means to make those children taller than nature meant them to be.

The means is called "recombinant human growth hormone." It was developed as a treatment for children whose pituitary glands do not produce normal amounts of growth hormone and thus are fated to reach adult heights of between four and five feet, putting them significantly below average. The artificial hormone was approved a decade ago by the Food and Drug Administration and has been used with mixed results; some children respond more positively to it than others, but there is as yet insufficient evidence to provide precise evaluations of the hormone's effectiveness.

This has been no deterrent to many parents whose children are just plain short: not abnormally so, but normally, boys who might grow up to be, say, 5 feet 7

Bogues, who tops out at 5 feet 3 inches, is an all-star professional basketball player in a league of giants.

Never mind any of that, just rush to the local Dr. Feelgood and get a prescription so that Dick can grow up to be as tall as Kareem. Three shots a week, childhood to adolescence, at about \$20,000 a year; round it off to \$250,000 for the entire program. If your kid doesn't test low enough to qualify for the treatment (and to have it paid for by your friendly health-insurance provider), keep taking him back until you get the numbers you want. Dr. Feelgood is always ready to write the prescription, and the drug industry would dearly love to shepherd you along from beginning to end.

Of course all those shots and that sudden spurt from 4 feet 9 to 7 feet 4 leave your kid a nervous wreck, but Dr. Feelgood has an answer for that, too, and Friendly Provider is ready to pay. Just put the kid on Ritalin. It was developed to treat children who suffer from hyperactivity, but so long as we've blurred the line between "normal" and "abnormal" height, it's a piece of cake to blur the one between "normal" and "abnormal" youthful energy. When in doubt, pop a pill.

If Ritalin doesn't do the trick, there's always Prozac. The whole nation has gone mellow yellow on Prozac, the cure-all to end all cure-alls, so why not the kids? "Virtually anything" surely means that Dick and Jane, stressed out over height, are every bit as entitled to their daily Prozac cool-down as are Mom and Dad, stressed out over whether Dick and Jane are going to be accepted at the best preschool program in town.

Pump them with pills and shots, then send them to McDonald's for a Big Mac or to Burger King for a Double Whopper. That's the message from another piece of health news that managed to find its way into Wednesday's papers. This was in the food section of the New York Times, which reported that a year after the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act became law, there is almost no evidence that Americans are eating—or feeding their children—a healthier diet. In fact, a study of 2,500 households found that "respondents ate a bit more

ground beef and quite a few more chocolate chip cookies during the year, and decided that butter was not so bad."

Under the labeling act, the feds have spent some \$1.5 million on an advertising campaign alerting the public to the dietary information available to them through food labels, and the food industry has spent some \$2 billion putting the labels on peanut butter jars and pizza boxes. All to almost no avail. People may know a little more about nutrition than they did a year ago, but apparently they are disinclined to put that knowledge to work at the supermarket.

There is in this, along with an ample dose of plain old human stupidity, a refreshing shot of contrariness, a disinclination to do what's good for us just because Uncle Dogood says we ought to do it. In any event we know that if for a couple of decades we overdo the Twinkies and the Bud, we can always take a hike—or a cab—down to Dr. Feelgood, who will whip out his scalpel and do the prettiest little liposuction you've ever seen. No doubt the same operation comes child-size, because in late 20th-century America, the human will counts for less than the restorative powers of science and technology.

It's weird. Throughout its history the United States has considered itself a nation "under God" charged with carrying out the "will of God," but when it comes to the little quirks with which the Creator has blessed us each and every one, we ignore Him and head for the laboratory. We have tonics and rugs to cure or disguise baldness, scalpel wizards to straighten noses and inflate breasts, hormone pushers to ratchet our kids onto the varsity basketball team.

One might think that we would be content with what nature has given us, so long as it's within the rather broad range of the "normal," but it seems that the ladies amongst us all want to be Cindy Crawford and the gents to be Michael Jordan. We haven't the patience to aim for those altitudes through self-discipline at the dining table or exertion at the gymnasium, so we leave it to the miracles of modern medicine. With Dr. Feelgood and Friendly Provider on the case, who needs the Man Upstairs?

inches, or girls headed for 5 feet 1. Never mind that history, which Americans never bother to read, tells us that many of the greatest of human beings, from Napoleon Bonaparte to Alan Ladd, were short, presumably driven to excellence by their determination to prove themselves better than tall people. Never mind that "average" is just that, not some arbitrary goal that dooms to failure those who fail to meet it. Never even mind that Muggsy