

An Executive Health Order  
by Mike DeCinti

Well yesterday we witnessed the pinnacle of our democratic society, the peaceful transfer of power to a new president. And although I am confident that the opinions of both our incoming and outgoing presidents are probably as diverse as our community itself, one thing I'm sure we agree on, is that the office of the President of the United States should be looked upon as a role model, especially to our youth.

We may not have voted for one particular president or another, and we don't have to agree with their policies, but we should feel confident that they would live their life in a way that can be seen as an example to others. And I strongly feel that this should include being physically fit, active and healthy.

In fact this has been an important part of the office of the president since 1956 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the President's Council on Youth Fitness (known today as the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.)

Growing up in Pennsylvania I remember taking the fitness challenge every year in school. We would have to run around the track or the gym, we had to do push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups. They even kept a record of our progress from year to year, gave us stickers and pins for reaching our goals and displayed the names of students in each grade who had the highest scores in each category.

Over the years and through the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush (41), Clinton and Bush (43) the President's Council has gone through a lot of changes. The Council probably reached its height of popularity when George H. Bush appointed Arnold Schwarzenegger as its chairman in 1989. And although the "fitness level" of our past presidents has been varied, I think it's safe to say that both George W. Bush and Barak Obama may be considered our most fit presidents, in recent history. George W. Bush was an avid runner and cyclist, and President Obama is a very active person who works out on a regular basis and enjoys playing basketball. However, it has been widely reported that President Obama is a smoker, although it's still not clear how much or often he does smoke.

According to their website at [fitness.gov](http://fitness.gov), "The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports advises the President through the Secretary of Health and Human Services about physical activity, fitness, and sports, and recommends programs to promote regular physical activity for the health of all Americans. The Council's programs, projects and public information materials/campaigns emphasize the importance of regular physical activity, including sports participation, for Americans of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. The Council collaborates with public and private sector sponsors to conduct programs and produce public information materials." And at quick glance you can easily see that this program has become very extensive and informative and offers advise and programs to all groups, from children to seniors.

One thing that caught my attention, when I reading about the history of the council, was the document that got it all started, and more importantly how it is still relevant today. In December 1953, Dr. Hans Kraus, M.D., associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at New York University, published an article “Muscular Fitness and Health” in the *Journal of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation*, claiming that the nation was becoming soft. He stated, “The affluent lifestyle of 20th century America was making life so easy and effortless that American adults and children were rapidly losing muscle tone.” And to compensate the author warned, “Americans would have to engage in regular exercise to attain a state of physical fitness comparable to that of an earlier era.”

And when Kraus tested about 4,400 students between ages 6 and 16 in public schools across the United States to about 3,000 European students in the same age range, the test results were startling. Fifty-six percent of the U.S. students failed at least one of the test components (which included activities such as leg lifts, sit-ups) however, only about eight percent of the European children failed even one of the test components. Kraus attributed the test results to lifestyle. Europeans relied less on automobiles, school buses, and elevators. European children walked miles to school, rode bicycles, hiked, and chopped and hauled wood for home heating. In contrast, American children were largely driven in cars by their parents, confined to their own neighborhoods, and performed only easy chores such as making their own beds, nothing more strenuous than walking the dog.

Sadly, 56 years later and the problem has only gotten worse. The advice then was simple but still holds true today. You need to eat less, move more and make healthy choices. So why not use the inauguration as your starting point for the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and create your own four-year plan.

Mike DeCinti is the marketing director for Lumberton Radiological Associates. He can be reached at [mdecinti@lraxray.com](mailto:mdecinti@lraxray.com) or by calling 738-8222, ext. 258.