

Author claims weight-loss industry, politics distort truth about obesity

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CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CHICAGO — Eric Oliver starts the acknowledgments of his new book, "Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic," with a distinctive first sentence: "This was not the book I intended to write."

Like most Americans, Oliver said he, too, believed there was a real obesity epidemic worthy of the constant hand-wringing and dire warnings of everyone from health officials to the diet industry.

He said he was like the rest of us — until he started doing some research. The conclusion of the University of Chicago political scientist: The people with the most to gain from our constant obsession over our weight are the weight-loss industry and diet doctors.

"Based on the statistics, most of the charges saying that obesity caused various diseases or that obesity caused thousands of deaths were simply not supported," Oliver said in his book.

Oliver, an associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago, was traveling out of the country recently but took

the time to participate in an interview via e-mail.

The following is an edited transcript:

Q: "In your book, you argue that America does not have an obesity epidemic. Most people would disagree with you."

A: "No one would deny that Americans have gotten fatter over the past 30 years, but that's different from saying we have 'an obesity epidemic.' To say we have an obesity epidemic means that this weight gain is a threat to a large number of Americans or that it is a spreading disease. However, the scientific evidence is simply not there that most people who are either 'overweight' or 'obese' are in any danger directly from their weight."

"The average American adult is between 8 to 12 pounds heavier today than in 1975. Because overweight and obesity are defined at such low levels, this small average weight gain has translated into large percentages of increase in the number of people considered 'overweight' or 'obese.'"

Q: "In your book, you argue that the perception that Americans have ballooned in size is largely a

myth pushed by the weight-loss industry and diet doctors. Explain."

A: "A small number of doctors and pseudo-scientific health organizations, like the International Obesity Task Force, have worked, with substantial financial backing of pharmaceutical companies and the diet industry, to lower the thresholds of what is considered 'overweight' and 'obese,' even though there was no scientific basis for saying that someone with a BMI (body mass index) of 25 is at any risk because of their weight. They have also lobbied the government to get obesity considered a disease and to make certain weight-loss treatments tax deductible. Nearly every prominent obesity 'expert' has been financed or supported in some way by the weight-loss industry."

Q: "How did our idea of a 'healthy weight' change?"

A: "Until a report by the National Institutes of Health, 'overweight' was a BMI greater than 27 and 'obese' was a BMI greater than 32. After the 1998 NIH report, suddenly tens of millions of Americans became 'obese' even though they hadn't gained a pound. For example, George Bush and Michael Jordan are both

overweight (under current standards) but nobody would say their weight is a problem.

"Of course, at very high levels of weight (say over 300 pounds on most people), there are some health-related problems that come from weighing too much, such as osteoarthritis and some cancers."

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Red Pepper Chicken

Provided by: www.allrecipes.com

What you need:

- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup uncooked long grain white rice
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 fluid ounces Mexican beer
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 fresh red chili pepper, finely chopped
- 1/2 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 lime, thinly sliced
- 1/2 lemon, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup grated Romano cheese

What to do:

In a saucepan, bring the water and rice to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 25 minutes or until rice is tender.

Heat the olive oil and 1 fluid ounce beer in a skillet over medium heat. Place the chicken in the skillet and season with chili powder, oregano, salt and pepper. Mix in the remaining beer, red bell pepper, chili pepper, garlic, lime and lemon. Cook about 15 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink and juices run clear.

Place the chicken and vegetables over the cooked rice and sprinkle with Romano cheese before serving.

Solutions

L	T	E	S	W	O	N	S	Y	R	E	E	B
E	L	E	D	T	R	I	N	E	N	A	L	I
S	S	S	E	S	H	A	R	N	E	V	A	L
A	R	I	T	A	G	E	T	A	M	S	T	E
S	E	A	S	E	L	A	I	L	E	M	A	I
N	A	L	A	N	E	R	E	A	B	A	R	E
S	E	R	E	S	E	T	A	G	E	R	E	S
E	P	O	S	E	P	O	S	E	P	O	S	E
Y	O	P	I	S	D	R	O	O	P	I	S	I
D	P	A	D	S	E	S	K	N	E	E	P	A
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BOXING • CONTINUED FROM 8

a great workout.

While training provides a great workout, boxers must also condition their bodies as well. Conditioning, a.k.a. "Road Work," is maintaining a level of

fitness accomplished with aerobic activity and strength training.

Running is the most commonly used aerobic activity. The Total Package coaches advise boxers to run at least two miles a day and perform sprints. Boxers

aim for leanness instead of muscle mass. Most coaches discourage heavy weight training and rely more on calisthenics like push-ups and sit-ups.

Boxing is a great workout, but at the beginning it is hard and can be unforgiving.

It is easy to see if a fighter is or isn't doing roadwork. Remember that boxing gets to be fun and must first be properly learned and appreciated.

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