

Braley Introduces Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act

Written by Jeff Giertz

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Iowa Congressman teams up with Olympic gold medalist to combat childhood obesity

Washington, DC – Rep. Bruce Braley (IA-01) today teamed up with gymnast, Olympic champion and West Des Moines resident Shawn Johnson to introduce the Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act, a bill that will combat childhood obesity by promoting the use of innovative technology to improve physical education programs in schools.

“Shawn Johnson has inspired countless young Iowans with her Olympic success,” Braley said. “She’s inspired me with her work as an advocate for improved physical fitness. That’s why naming this bill the Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act is such a fitting tribute.

Braley continued, “The Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act will improve physical education in schools by incorporating new technology in the curriculum, allowing instructors to better tailor instruction to individual students through the use of equipment like heart monitors. Expanding technology use in PE class will make fitness more engaging for kids and more effective, teaching students how to stay active and combating childhood obesity. And as Shawn knows,

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staying healthy starts with learning healthy habits.”

Shawn Johnson said, “To me, this is about finding new opportunities to get young people excited about fitness and exercise. Kids of all ages use technology in their lives every day, from video games to iPods to cellphones. Using technology in PE class is the obvious next step, an opportunity to make exercise more fun for young people. And if we can do that, I think kids and teenagers will be more likely to go to the gym and make it a habit.”

Shawn Johnson, who won one gold and three silver medals in gymnastics at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, has long been an advocate for exercise and physical fitness. In March, Shawn visited Capitol Hill where she met with Congressional leaders in support of the Paralympics. It was during this visit that Braley and Shawn learned of their mutual interest in improving physical education programs in schools.

The Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act would expand to more local schools a physical education program pioneered by the University of Northern Iowa and the Grundy Center (Iowa) School District. Since 2004, UNI and Grundy Center Schools have partnered together to improve PE classes through the use of technology.

UNI offers a masters degree program in physical education that emphasizes the use of technology in teaching. Graduate students in this program work as full time PE instructors in Grundy Center, where they learn to incorporate technology like heart monitors, computerized fitness assessment programs, and pocket PCs into their curriculum. The technology allows instructors to better tailor PE activities to individual students’ ability level and teaches students to track their own progress. UNI researchers also use data from the program to study the effectiveness of PE courses.

The Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act would seek to expand this successful model by creating a grant program to fund 10 new masters’ degree programs that emphasize the use of technology in teaching. Universities receiving grants would partner with a local school district to implement the masters’ program. Funds could also be used to purchase equipment and technology to enhance physical activity and fitness levels.

UNI and Grundy Center’s partnership has received national attention. In 2009, US Education

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Secretary Arne Duncan visited the school to learn more about the program.

According to the Iowa Department of Health, the obesity rate of Iowa children in grades 9 – 12 is 11.3 percent. Many obese and overweight children develop illnesses like heart disease or Type 2 diabetes, which require long-term medical care.

The Shawn Johnson Fitness for Life Act is similar to a bill Braley first introduced in 2010.

More information about the bill, including the bill text, can be found at the following link: <http://go.usa.gov/5vL>

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