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Debate over IRS Breastfeeding Supplies Rule

All the while, breastfeeding supplies were never allowed as tax-deductible items. This was because breast milk is considered a nutritional food and not medication. But recently, there was a change in the ruling. Now the IRS made expenses for breastfeeding supplies like breast pumps, bottles etc a tax-deductible expense. This made many pediatricians, doctors, nursing mothers and pro-breastfeeding organizations very happy. This change coincided with First Lady, Michelle Obama supporting the call for nursing mothers to breastfeed as part of her campaign against child obesity.

However, this did not go down well with certain quarters. Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn) claims the First Lady's stand is 'hard left' and suggested she was creating a 'nanny state'. In the same way, Sarah Palin made light of First Lady Obama's support for breastfeeding. At a recent speech, she said, "No wonder Michelle Obama is telling everybody, 'You'd better breast-feed your baby,' Yeah, you'd better, because the price of milk is so high right now."

The new rule states that nursing mothers can claim tax deductions for expenses on breastfeeding supplies if their total medical expenses are higher than 7.5% of the total adjusted gross income or if they have flexible

spending accounts.

The rule has found support from many quarters like the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) who has lobbied for years to get the government to classify breastfeeding equipment as medical supplies.

Likewise, the Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin in her statement, "Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding", strongly recommended that nursing mothers breastfeed their infants stating that breastfeeding helps to ward off child asthma, diarrhea, pneumonia and child obesity.

More support for breastfeeding came from the Alleghany County Health Department that every year awards businesses and public premises that accommodate breastfeeding. The Department recognizes the crucial role the IRS ruling plays in helping nursing mothers afford the items they need to breastfeed. The department's spokesman, Guillermo Cole expressed regret that the IRS ruling has been politicized. The department's view is that this issue has nothing to do with politics but has everything to do with encouraging breastfeeding for those who wish to do so, something that benefits all regardless of their political persuasion.

Likewise, Dr. Richard Schandler, the chairman of the AAP breastfeeding section said the association supports breastfeeding because of its health benefit, not out of any political agenda. Dr. Schandler said, "The government isn't legislating that women breast-feed, they're just making it easier, like they've made it easier to get antibiotics for all children."