

Let them drink soda



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The controversial topic of imposing a “soda tax”, or surcharge to sweetened beverages, in the US, is one that has been debated for many years. The purpose of the tax is to discourage people from purchasing sugary drinks in hopes that healthier alternatives would be purchased more often and therefore having a positive effect on the obesity epidemic in America and the rising healthcare costs as a result of obesity. Those that are for the tax, believe that it is a step toward a healthier nation and those that are against it, believe that it will not greatly impact the obesity rate.

It could be argued that while soda consumption is a contributing factor, obesity is a result of overall caloric intake and therefore will not be overcome by the unfair taxation of a single item. An additional tax should not be placed on soda because it will potentially have a negative impact on the beverage industry and millions of their employees, it will unfairly burden the poor and non-overweight people, and in the end, consumers will switch to purchasing less expensive items with comparable calories. Taxing soda will have ramifications for the beverage industry.

For this reason, organizations such as the American Beverage Association, or ABA, have spent millions lobbying against the creation of this tax. The government has admitted that the purpose is to encourage people to make healthier choices and consume less soda. A drop in revenue will have a negative effect on the beverage companies' bottom line and will eventually impact their employees. Soda companies have taken steps in recent years to sell their products responsibly.

Some of these things include: removing soda from schools, not marketing to children under twelve, paying for anti-obesity campaigns, putting calorie

information on the front of their packaging, and offering cans that contain smaller portions. The soda companies do not deserve the potential negative impact that a soda tax could have on their industry. They are a legit business that produce a valid product choice for consumers. There is no difference in their so-called “relentless marketing” to that of other industries. Aside from the negative impact to the beverage industry, it will also negatively impact their largest customer base, the poor.

An additional tax will cause soda to be less affordable among the poor and, in turn, deprive them of a tasty drink with their meal and instead force them to drink the low cost, tasteless alternative of water. In “Let Them Drink Water!”, Daniel Engber states, “A fat tax, then, discriminates among the varieties of gustatory experience. And its impact would fall most directly on the poor, nonwhite people who tend to be the most avid consumers of soft drinks and the most sensitive to price. (643)

Supporters of the soda tax would say that since sugar-sweetened beverages are not a necessity, the impact on the poor would not be financial, but strictly luxurious. But regardless of our socioeconomic status, don't we all need some luxury in our life? As small as it may seem, enjoying a soda with a meal as opposed to water may provide pleasure to some low income people and could be considered a contributing factor to their quality of life. Why should they resort to water, while the rich continue to indulge in the higher priced soft drinks?

A soda tax will not solve the obesity problem in America because it has a much larger following than only the poor or cost-conscious. In “Does This Tax Make Me Look Fat?”, Jeff Osborne quotes Shahram Heshmat, an <https://assignbuster.com/let-them-drink-soda/>

associate professor of public health at the University of Illinois and author of *Eating Behavior and Obesity: Behavioral Economics Strategies for Health Professionals* (2011). “ These tax strategies seem based on the idea that obese people are making rational economic decisions about food.

But the overweight don't make eating choices to ' maximize utility. ' There are so many other factors - biological, cultural, unconscious - unrelated to economics. Even if these people lost weight, they'd probably gain it all back. ” (648) This brings up a very good point. Obesity is a complicated issue. Most overweight people do not make food choices based on rational decisions, but rather compulsive, indulgent ones. This requires changes in behavior, not hoping that their sound economic judgment will keep them from spending a few more pennies for a soda.

In “ A Tax That Invests in Our Health”, Richard F. Daines is quoted as saying, “ Sixty percent of New York adults are overweight or obese, and so are one-third of our children. Many factors contribute to obesity, but there's one pernicious one: added sugar. ” (632) This statement is true, however added sugars exist in thousands of products on the market that will not be subject to the increased tax. Americans may buy less soda if the price increased, but would it stop them from buying all things unhealthy? Not even close.

There are many other low cost foods that contribute to the obesity epidemic in the US that would not be affected by the proposed increased tax and that also feed the rising healthcare costs. The government can make soda more expensive, but it cannot force people to make healthier choices or lose weight. These decisions must come from the individual and that is where the focus should be. Encourage healthier choices through education,

advertisement, and lower health care costs for individuals that maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle.

Many people would argue that they are overweight due to heredity and not bad diet choices and therefore are unfairly excluded from the lower healthcare costs. However, studies and past research have shown that a healthy diet and above average physical activity can overcome being genetically predisposed to obesity. The imposition of the soda tax would not produce meaningful results to reduce obesity and healthcare costs and would unfairly impact the earnings of beverage companies.

The poor, as avid consumers of soda, would be financially impacted but still continue to buy it. The overweight population, in the end, would open their wallets to the extra change they would have to pay to get what they want. If there is one thing about America, people will find a way to get what they really want. It's the American way. What is not the American way is a law trying to govern what we drink. This is a bad attempt at social engineering. As long as we live in this wonderful land of the free, I say, " Let them drink Soda! "