

Essay:

As obesity quickly becomes the number-one health threat in the United States, should the Federal Government apply excise taxes to high sugar, high fat content foods, including sodas, candies, and ice creams, as has been done with tobacco products?

Though obesity is undoubtedly a looming health threat to the citizens of the United States, the Federal Government should not apply excise taxes to foods that are deemed “unhealthy.” The technical nightmare that is the so-called “Twinkie Tax” is yet another attempt to violate American freedoms, along with potentially negatively impacting lower income families and failing to acknowledge the many factors that influence weight gain.

To begin, the idea of taxing unhealthy junk foods, which has been pioneered by Dr. Kelly Brownell, a psychology professor at Yale University, is yet another endeavor to infringe upon American freedoms and limit free choice. Brownell has decided to target successful food companies and engage the media with inflammatory comments such as how the American public is “[. . .] sitting idly by while the food companies are selling [them] massive portions of unhealthy food” (Junk). While Brownell’s concern for public health is endearing, his arguments are comical. Brownell fails to acknowledge that individuals are the ones that are buying these products. Food companies are simply giving Americans

what they want, and if buying habits are any indication of what Americans want, the multi-billion dollar "junk" food industry is proof that Americans wish to purchase and consume these foods.

This being noted, it is not to say that the obesity epidemic is not a dire situation facing the American public. But while this may be so, it should be acknowledged that imposing a tax on unhealthy food will only cause more problems. Most apparent is how imposing a tax on the broad category of "unhealthy food" would be a technical nightmare. Other than simply defining what unhealthy foods are, the calculation of the specific tax values would undoubtedly leave companies spending millions of dollars switching the content and packaging of their newly black-listed products. This unnecessary spending will indisputably lead to a decrease in profits, and could also result in layoffs and increased unemployment in areas that have a large portion of the community working for a particular food company.

There are also a myriad of other problems with the proposal of a tax on unhealthy food. First, implementing this tax could potentially negatively impact lower income families in our country. Most notably, families who spend a high percentage of their income on food will certainly be affected by an increase in prices for "unhealthy" foods, which are normally reasonably inexpensive. These families will be forced to either spend more for the "unhealthy" food they usually purchase, or purchase so-called "healthy" food that is, in many cases, more expensive. Either way, the purchasing power of lower income families will dramatically drop. Second, the idea of a tax on "unhealthy" food to fight the obesity epidemic is ignoring the many other factors that influence weight gain. It is a well-known fact that a balanced diet and regular exercise are key to living a healthy lifestyle. Though many disregard this advice, that is their own prerogative. Limiting some individuals' abilities to purchase certain "unhealthy" foods will do nothing to make them eat healthier or go out and exercise. Those who want to fight the epidemic should instead be focusing on changing the attitudes of Americans concerning healthy lifestyles, not on changing their rights as Americans to buy what they wish.

In conclusion, the Federal Government should not apply excise taxes to foods that are deemed to be "unhealthy." Other than this proposed tax being ineffective, hurting lower income families, and being a technical nightmare, the so-called "Twinkie Tax" is a violation of American's rights to buy what they want and make their own choices.

Works Cited

Crowley, Michael. "Junk Deal." Men's Health (10544836) 17.6 (July 2002): 136. Academic Search

Premier. EBSCO. Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library, St. Peter, MN. 4 May 2009

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=6976672&site=ehost-live>>.