

## Obesity; The New Tobacco?

Increases in obesity and diabetes among U.S. children and adults continue in both sexes, all ages, all races and all educational levels. Obesity is strongly associated with several major health risk factors such as diabetes and heart disease. Due to these possible health risks does this give the government the right to control what we eat? Many of the liberal do-gooders believe that it is their mission to save us from ourselves and to control every aspect of our lives. I disagree!

Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, wrote of our rights to life, liberty and property (which later became Pursuit of Happiness). In these days of liberal insurgence, we need to take a step back and regain control of our personal rights. We need to stop these people from invading our private domains. We are all adults - we have minds and we can decide for ourselves if we want to drink alcohol, sugared sodas or smoke tobacco products. It is not the right of government to control our minds, thoughts or bodies.

The question posed to us is whether the Federal Government should apply excise taxes to "unhealthy foods" as has been done with tobacco products?

In order to answer this I think we first need to look at what increased tobacco taxes has done to revenue and smoking as a whole. Take for instance my home state of Minnesota; we currently have a cigarette tax of \$1.35/pack in addition to the federal taxes, plus a 70% tax on the wholesale price of Other Tobacco Products (OTP) which, of course, includes cigars. Since implementing the tax increases the revenue in the state has dropped yearly from \$40MM to \$38MM to an expected income of \$32MM for 2009. Has this decreased smoking in the state? One might think so based on the decreased revenue, but the fact is you have had border jumping. Two years ago the Governor of the state of North Dakota thanked Minnesota's Governor for a \$15MM windfall thanks to our tobacco tax increases. So, no; smoking has not decreased in Minnesota. What the state has accomplished, is to hit the point of diminishing return with taxes and has cost itself money, while doing nothing to decrease health costs by getting people to quit smoking.

So now let's take a look at taxing high sugar and high fat content foods. In as much as increasing taxes on tobacco has not caused people to quit smoking, neither will increasing taxes on the "bad" foods get people to stop drinking their sodas or eating their Big Macs™. It is foolish to assume that you can scare people away from things that they enjoy by simply making them more expensive. We've increased taxes on alcohol and, in fact, outlawed it at one point but yet people drink. We've taxed tobacco beyond comprehension, yet people continue to smoke. Remember as a child the more you were told you couldn't have something, the more you wanted it. The same holds true for all the "sins" listed above.

There are options to increasing taxes on the high sugar and high fat foods, such as education and regulations. The question is, do we really want government involved in our personal choices? If we give in to what we eat, what's next, what type of bed we sleep on?

The bottom line is, "Let me live my *life* as I see fit! Don't invade my personal *liberties*! And let me *pursue happiness* in the way I want to!"