

Essay

Every day, the very freedom this nation was founded on continues to be threatened and violated as intrusive laws and regulations make their way into people's personal lives. The excessive taxes and unfair laws thrown recklessly onto the shoulders of the tobacco industry and its consumers make a great example, but the often debated and upcoming issue of the excise taxing of unhealthy foods stands just as tall. Regulation and moderation of consumables should be left to the people and their discretion rather than to the government and its "well-intending" taxes. Applying taxes in such a way is an ulterior method of restriction and control similar to those found in socialist nations.

The fact that foods high in fat, sugar and salt are damaging to an individual's health is rarely debated. Obesity is quickly becoming the greatest health threat to Americans, and something must be done to reverse it. However, the answer lies, not in government taxation, but in educational programs and further research on the matter. American citizens should have the right to choose for themselves what they believe is appropriate or not for their life and philosophy. While many will see fast foods as harmful and to be avoided because its consequences to health, others may see it as a practical and accessible way to enjoy life. For many people, life would not be worth living without the many small pleasures contained within it, including the consumption of certain foods or of tobacco.

There are very few remaining individuals who are unaware of the dangers of unhealthy food consumption, who may be deceived by the media into downplaying the negative effects of these foods. These people should be properly educated so that they can make the decision for themselves, but never taxed for choosing to live a certain way or follow a certain lifestyle or philosophy. The same applies to the ongoing barrage of taxes and regulations on tobacco. With them, the government is discriminating against people of a certain mindset and philosophy with hefty taxes and other obstructions.

Thomas Jefferson once described a good government as one "*which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement . . .*" Excise taxation based on health, or the interest of the people impedes freedom, regardless of its good intentions.

The tobacco industry has undergone much persecution in this respect, with cigarettes being taxed as high as \$3.46 per pack in Rhode Island (as of April 10, 2009). The situation has gotten out of hand with tobacco, and as the government exercises its personal grudge against the industry, many citizens are left suffering the exorbitant fees and cannot easily live life the way they choose to. The thought of expanding this kind of excessive taxation to other industries and impeding the lives of more citizens is a troubling one. This kind of taxation should not only be prevented from spreading to other industries, but abandoned altogether.

Overall, government manipulation of the people through taxation is never a positive thing. It was wrong when done to tobacco consumers, and would be wrong to do to fast food and confection consumers (covering a much larger percentage of the population). We as American citizens have the right to make decisions without being discriminated against for our beliefs and philosophies that govern those decisions. As James Madison once said, "The ultimate authority . . . resides in the people alone."