

Other Viewpoints

Soft drink tax not a sweet idea

No doubt, those who believe a tax should be placed on sugary soda will be bubbling with excitement over the results of a new study on the controversial idea.

Research published in the Archives of Internal Medicine this month showed that a tax of 20 percent to 40 percent on regular soda and artificially sweetened beverages would generate \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion in revenue. It also would lead to weight loss of as much as 1.3 pounds per person among Americans, researchers said.

Those revenue figures look sweet, no doubt.

But a soda tax is still impossible to swallow for practically as many reasons as Dr Pepper has secret flavors.

Let's start with the fact that soda and other sweetened beverages, in moderation, aren't any more unhealthy than many other drinks and foods. How can it be justified, then, to single them out?

The answer from proponents of a soda tax would be that sweetened drinks often aren't consumed in moderation and therefore are a key contributor to obesity.

There's no doubt that obesity is a serious problem in the U.S. Two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, and sweetened beverages are certainly part of the cause.

But the researchers' findings would suggest that a beverage tax wouldn't do much to curb the epidemic. It might provide extra incentive for people to lose weight, but the loss of 1.3 pounds won't go far toward helping obese people regain their fitness.

A spokesman for the American Beverage Association got it right when he said measures like soda taxes don't work to solve a complex problem like obesity.

Taxes don't make people healthier, he said. "What does make people healthier," he added, "is making smart and educated decisions about diet and exercise."

Those who support taxing drinks say revenue generated through the measure could help in that regard by being used to serve healthier foods in schools or build parks and recreation centers.

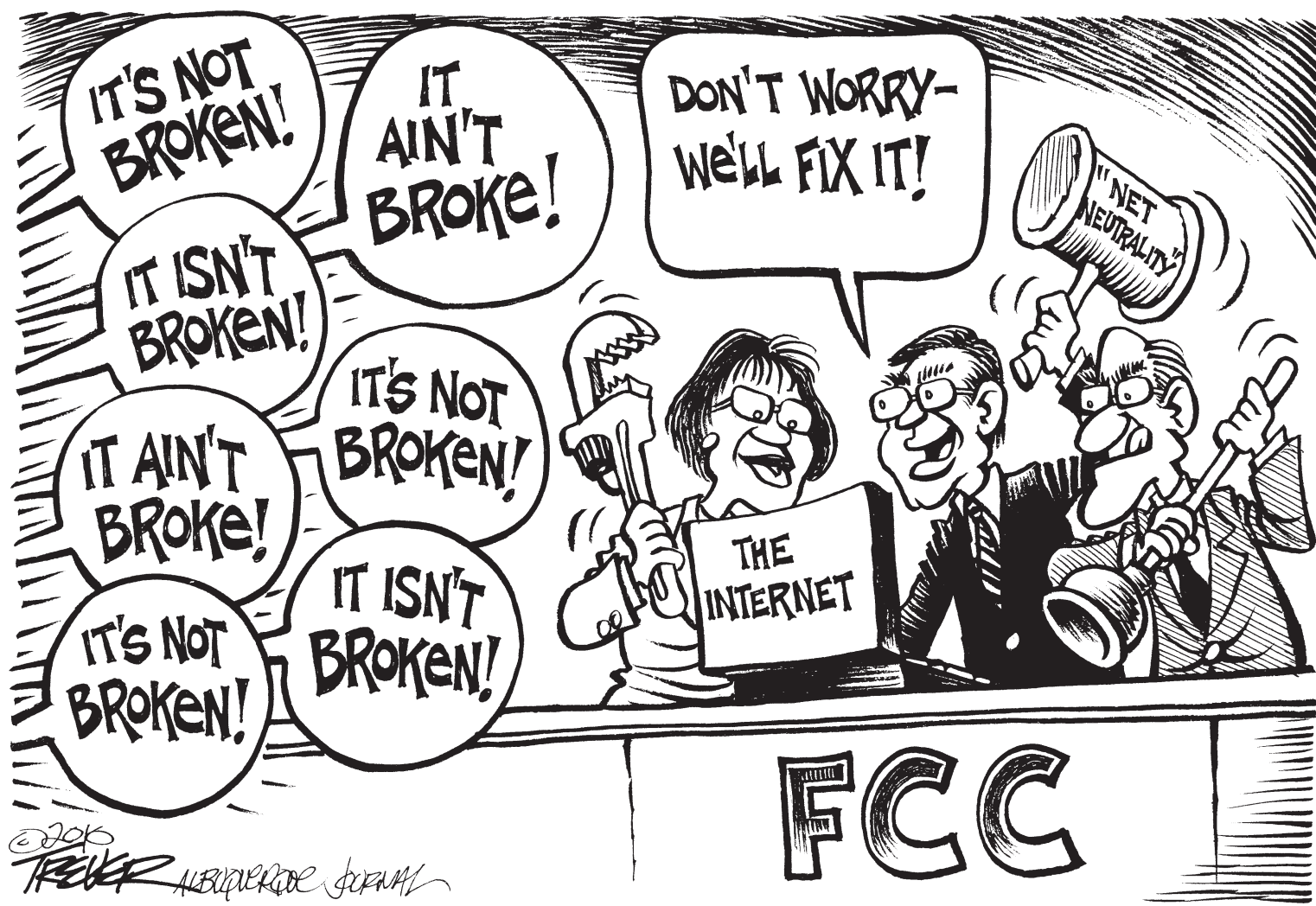
But just because the money might be put to good use doesn't make the tax taste any better. Rather, it smacks of "nanny state" legislation, and the government has already imposed more than enough of that, thank you.

Still, don't be surprised if more proposals on the issue crop up – and not just in Washington or another state.

Kansas lawmakers briefly considered a beverage tax during the 2010 session before shooting it down, but there's always a chance legislators could revisit the issue in their incessant search for tax revenue.

This is an idea, however, that should be poured down the drain.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*



Now for what you really wanted ...

In spite of what the purists may say, Christmas is over. So – it's time to hit the stores!

With the exception of those who celebrate on a different day – say, New Year's, for example – the feast has been reduced to leftovers, the pile of packages has been leveled, and the frantic urgency of a looming deadline has relaxed into occasional forays into trying to bring order out of the remaining chaos.

This week between holidays, but not really a holiday itself, is a time like no other. Yes, there are those who take the last week of the year off, like schools. Then there are those of us who have to drag ourselves back in, wondering if we can't go back to school just to get this week off.

But those who have to work the hardest are probably the store clerks taking returns. That's not the worst job in the world, I guess, but it's got to spawn a lot of headaches in the week after Christmas.

Some of us, though, work hard at shopping. There have been years, in fact, when I did the bulk of my Christmas shopping on Dec. 26. All those hot, must-have items are now marked down for quick disposal. It's as if they were suddenly identified as being not worthy



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

of sitting on a store shelf.

It's all a matter of perspective, of course. To some of us, it's a chance to get what we have been hinting for – asking for – OK, begging for – which has somehow never made it onto anyone's shopping list. Just because no one else can find it, or no one else can believe I actually want it, is really no reason not to get what I really need.

Let's face it. Many Christmas gifts are chosen out of desperation by someone who really has no idea what your heart's desire might be. They want to show you they care about you, and that's nice, but the way they show you is by getting what they want instead of what you want.

This especially applies to guys, whether they are 4 or 40. Their shopping patterns fall into

three main groups: One group falls back on the candy-jewelry-perfume list. That's fine, especially since it's the only time of the year that it might occur to them you like such things.

The next group are the big spenders: They will go all out and get their wives something really expensive to show they care – something like a vacuum, a washing machine, a gourmet mixer/bread machine/dishwasher. The best response to this, of course, is to get them a lawn mower.

Then there are the guys who buy exactly what they want themselves. In little kids, this translates into GI Joe and toy cars in Mom's stocking. Bigger boys like bigger toys, so hubby might just surprise wife with a new fishing boat instead. Hope the old lady likes to fish!

There is a fourth kind of gift: Cash. With cash, you can get the perfect outfit – or the perfect kitchen gadget or outdoor toy – with some left over. After all, everything in the store is 50 percent off the week after Christmas.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

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He'll take the heel, please

You've got to forgive me, but during this holiday season, seems like my thoughts turn to food and all of the wonderful homemade dishes of this season.

I do enjoy the great fellowship with family and friends, but alas, what would this season be without something good to eat?

I love it all – turkey with dressing, ham and cranberries, mashed potatoes, green beans, wonderful cheeses and probably my favorite, freshly baked breads hot out of the oven. I can smell it now. If only I could eat some. I especially enjoy the heel.

You'll never convince me bread isn't the staff of life, healthy for you and so good. Still some physicians, diet conscious individuals and health fanatics have stopped eating bread. They contend it is fattening and unhealthy.

Quite the opposite is true if you visit with nutritionists, bakers, physicians and those associated with culinary delights – you know the cooks, the people who spend those hours in the kitchen cooking, baking or grilling this



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

wonderful food.

Bread is good for us. Bread is low in calories, high in fiber and starches, an excellent source of protein and contains vitamins and minerals our bodies need.

Two slices of bread have only 140 to 150 calories. In today's health-conscious society, many individuals see bread only as a source of carbohydrates, but bread is much, much more.

Most nutritionists and health professionals believe our current dietary practices need a modification or shift to bread and other cereal grain products as opposed to sweets. Complex carbohydrates appear to have value in

the management of disease. They also can improve physical endurance and mental alertness and help control obesity.

All bread varieties belong in the diet. Americans may want to consider a shift to more bread-based foods for health reasons.

For decades, the United States has shown a tremendous decline in per capita use of flour. At one time, Americans consumed about 200 pounds per person. That figure has dropped to 100 pounds.

If the American public would realize that bread and other cereal-grain products are healthy, they might increase the use of these products in their diets. Such a change could help increase the sales of wheat-based foods that in turn would help Kansas and American farmers.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Are glowing trees in Christmas' future?

Scientists are developing a Christmas tree that glows in the dark without the need for electric bulbs. The genetic adaptation, as Roger Highfield reports, has already been successful in fish. But hanging fish on the branches could only be an interim solution.

If the glowing trees – or Frankenpines, as no doubt they will be known – perform well, perhaps they might be planted along motorways to save on electric lights. Plantations of them could spell out the names of consumer prod-

Other Opinions

• What people say in Kansas, elsewhere

ucts to delight airborne audiences captive in a

holding pattern over snow-delayed airports.

At home, the technology will certainly need perfecting, otherwise it might mean that if the tree does not light up first time, you would have to go round twiddling every needle till it works. Next, perhaps, self-cooking turkeys.

— *The Telegraph, London, via the Associated Press*

Online: www.telegraph.co.uk/sorindex,newsmind

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

