

Newton's first law of motion states that "Every body continues in its state of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it."

Recently the course of our nation's health has taken a turn for the worse with the growing problem of obesity. Legislators have suggested that the best way to correct this troublesome trajectory is through the corrective force of an excise tax on sugary, fattening foods. This solution has precedents in similar taxes to tobacco products. However, we must consider that the danger of allowing the government to impress a corrective force on legitimate consumer choices by means of taxation is far worse than the causative health concern.

When excise taxes were first applied to tobacco products due to their harmful health affects we allowed the government to start on a slippery slope of attempting to influence our choices. It seemed like an innocent thing to add a few cents to a pack of cigarettes in order to fund healthcare programs. However, the result of setting such a precedent is that now the government is attempting to bully us into what it deems are better choices by way of our pocketbooks. Last month the tobacco industry was levied the single largest tax increase in the history of our nation. If excise taxes are applied to junk foods there is no defining limit to the taxation. What starts as an extra penny for a soda could expand into the highway robbery that smokers are experiencing. Products such as tobacco and junk food are inelastic; their demand stays fairly constant over a significant change in cost. Therefore, if the government is going to pressure us into avoiding those items it requires a huge price increase.

Regardless of how this trend of government intervention started, it cannot be allowed to continue. It comes down to an issue of freedom. We cannot claim to be a nation that strives to protect freedom if our government is trampling on its own consumers. It is not an acceptable practice to punish people for making legitimate choices, no matter the outcome of those choices. In accordance with the theme of correcting consumers who might be damaging their health, we can expect to see excise taxes

on driving and skydiving and any other voluntary activity with the potential to make the consumer a burden on the healthcare system.

When it comes to these taxes, one must ask what is really being taxed, unhealthy products or our intelligence. The statement that the government is sending us through excise taxes is that we are not smart enough to make healthy choices for ourselves. The fact remains that it is our right to make whatever choice, no matter how healthy or unhealthy. In his first Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson described the sum of good government as, "A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned." The practice of the government in attempting to steer us through our wallets has to stop. While the direction of our nation might need to change, especially in relation to our health, the government should never play the role of a corrective force.