

Advocacy for the Soda Pop Tax
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Madame President and Board of Commissioners:

Thank you for your leadership. I think the debate over this soda pop tax is important, and so I wish to lend my voice.

I feel Madame President you have been honest about one of the reasons for this tax is a way of tackling our County's significant budget issues. In general, I see it as a legitimate responsibility of government to tax for our collective benefit as long as it does so transparently. As a private citizen, who enjoys, no loves pop and other sugary drinks, I am happy to do my part and pay the tax. And if one of its primary designs is to mitigate the deficit, save jobs and support needed programs, I am good with that. I appreciate your openness.

I also feel that public health benefits of this tax could make a significant difference. The evidence is abundant that soda pop intake contributes to obesity, diabetes and other grave health risks. And when the American Heart Association, World Health Organization, Center for Science in the Public Interest and Illinois Public Health Institute line up in support of taxation on sugary drinks, I pay attention.

Now that said, I do have concerns about the extent to which these tax funds will support obesity and diabetes prevention, and I think this tax would be greater legitimized by such efforts. This is especially important because there are hundreds of thousands of people receiving SNAP benefits who are exempt from this tax and may not enjoy the accompanying health improvements anticipated. While healthy choices ultimately are individual choices, it seems to me the public health argument would be strengthened if, somehow, less people were exempt. Moreover, as you are well aware, Chicago is a gargantuan food desert, and we cannot ignore improving access to fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods to the half-a-million or so of our neighbors who live in our local food deserts.

Before I close, I am pleased that this tax will double the allocation for community-based, anti-violence programs. I agree with you Madame President that violence is a powerful public health matter, and we must ensure creative ways to preventing it.

As a person of faith, there are many ways to save lives, and this tax helps improve diet and safety. In that sense, this is a just cause that merits support, whether the tax itself is popular or not.