

Essay

As Americans, we left our brethren in Europe centuries ago; we cast off the shackles of oppressive governance and ruthless regulation with the belief in our own self-sufficiency and self-reliance. We blazed trails from uncharted swaths of land, conquered the unconquerable and built, with humble tools and unflinching persistence, the strongest and most successful nation to grace the annals of history. This is the American spirit.

Like the wilds we tamed centuries ago, our American spirit is now under threat from those who wish to tame *us*. Recently, there have been propositions of a “fat tax” that is to be levied upon fattening foods or ingredients. The justification for this tax appears to be financial in nature, the theory being that people who consume these foods are more likely to be overweight or obese and therefore a burden on the health care system. Fat tax proponents make a factually sound case. According to a February 2007 Government Accountability Office report, the extra costs imposed by obese individuals in both public and private health care are inadvertently passed along and shared with healthy individuals. Couple this with a social tidal wave of an estimated 78 million “Baby Boomers,” over 40% of whom are clinically obese, and one may begin to understand the gravity of the issue. But as free Americans, we must ask ourselves a question based not in the realm of finance, but in the realm of principle. Where does this regulation stop? At what point will every American citizen engage in an activity that is considered unhealthy or undesirable?

If we allow ourselves to open the Pandora’s box of regulating human behavior by way of taxation, we are allowing a very dangerous authoritarian precedent to be set. As stated by the now-famous Martin Niemöller in regards to his living in Nazi Germany:

When the Nazis came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist. When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent; I was not a social democrat. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I was not a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out.

While Niemöller was referring to events far more insidious than taxation, could American history books of the future be littered with eerily similar references in regards to our regulation of others? If we allow this to happen, are we just as guilty in singling out groups of people because of their choices, decisions, dispositions or preferences?

The solution to this problem lies not in taxation. It lies in our united acceptance of human difference. America is made up of people from every race, religion, creed and country. We all have conflicting views on how govern, how to solve problems and how to achieve what we perceive to be the best for our country. We must, as a single body, collaborate together to bring forth a win-win situation. To tax others by force will only create financial distress on those being taxed. To let the problem continue to fester, healthy citizens will be burdened by the unhealthy.

As Lao Tzu once said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," and our journey to a plausible solution is no different. If obese citizens are intent upon seeing those who carry their burden as the real threat, an ideal solution will never be met. Yet if America is to become complacent in using the government as a tool to force through oppressive regulation on minorities, then we *all* shall suffer.