

Supersized government won't reduce obesity in the U.S. | Washington Examiner context for the exercise of free choice."

In addition to scaring people away from targeted products, such public "education" is designed to build support for regressive "sin" taxes on certain food products, new regulations on product marketing and labeling, or bans or limits on some ingredients.

Food and beverage demonization also helps pave the way for activists' third and perhaps most potent, tactic: a national wave of lawsuits. Class action suits alleging that food and beverage product labels or ads are misleading or false are on the rise. Most such lawsuits may lead to minor marketing changes, but the most damaging ones will advance the claim that companies engineer foods to be "addictive." These have potential for huge damage awards and attorneys' fees, as well as expensive, widespread changes to our food.

After the dust settles from all the negative rhetoric and legal maneuvering, will Americans be any thinner? Messages that foment fear are more likely to cause consumer apathy or rebellion than better eating habits. Soda and fatty food taxes will just harm lower-income consumers, and graphic warning labels or advertising bans, as many studies have shown, are ineffective.

Instead of embracing Mayor Mike Bloomberg's proposed ban on 16 ounce drinks and other silly rules, activists should invest time and resources in workable solutions. Government can positively and neutrally inform consumers' diet choices, with an emphasis on moderation and variety. It should continue and expand opportunities for physical activity in public schools and provide safe places for kids to play. Public interest groups should turn their PR efforts away from judgmental scolding and instead arm people with positive ideas on the many small diet and exercise strategies that can make a big difference.

Abundant choices, the free flow of information and innovation are the types of American values that can, if allowed, reduce our collective waistline. Supersized portions of government, on the other hand, will only eat away our freedoms.

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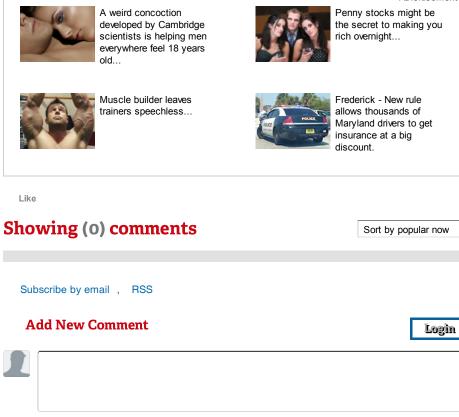


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