The Honorable Max Baucus United States Senate 511 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

As health care, nutrition, and advocacy organizations, and individuals deeply concerned about the obesity epidemic in this country, particularly among our nation's children, we urge you to include a tax on soft drinks and other sugar-laden beverages that have no or minimal nutritional value, as part of your health care reform bill. A soft drink tax would not only help to finance important health care reform and prevention efforts, but also improve public health by reducing obesity.

More than two-thirds of American adults are obese or overweight. Because of rising obesity rates, this may be the first generation in our nation's history that has a shorter life expectancy than the prior generation. While many factors contribute to weight gain, soft drinks are the only food or beverage shown to have a direct link to obesity, which in turn can lead to hypertension, strokes, heart attacks, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, and other health and psychosocial problems. In addition, consumption of sugary beverages can cause tooth decay and dental erosion.

Americans spend \$95 billion a year on medical expenditures related to obesity, of which half is paid for with Medicare and Medicaid dollars. While obesity should be addressed through a wide variety of actions, one action should be for the federal government to levy a tax on non-diet soft drinks to recoup some of the costs incurred by the government from the consumption of these drinks, as well as to reduce consumption. The revenues could help fund health care generally and, in particular, prevention and wellness provisions in health reform legislation by funding programs to promote healthy diets and exercise (such as building bike paths and inner-city basketball courts, providing healthier foods in schools, mounting mass-media campaigns, and increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables).

Taxes on tobacco have proven to be highly effective in raising revenues and reducing consumption. The same would be true for a tax on soft drinks. A tax of one cent per 12-ounces would raise about \$1.5 billion annually; a tax of one cent per ounce could generate about \$16 billion a year in federal revenues. Each penny tax per 12 ounces would reduce consumption by about one percent.

Taxing soft drinks is not a new idea. Over a dozen states, including Arkansas, California, New York, and West Virginia, have imposed excise taxes or sales taxes on soft drinks to generate revenue for health care or other purpose.

According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey, a majority of Americans support taxes on unhealthy items, such as a tax on soft drinks, particularly when the revenue generated is tied to health care reform and prevention.

We urge you to include a soft drink tax as part of your health care reform bill.

Sincerely,

Organizations

America Walks Institute for America's Health

American Public Health Association Montana Dietetic Association

American Society of Bariatric Oral Health America

Physicians

Partnership for Prevention Black Women's Health Imperative

Physician's Committee for Responsible

California Center for Public Health Medicine Advocacy

California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

Shape Up America! Center for Science in the Public Interest*

Trust for America's Health

Citizens' Committee for Children of

New York, Inc. University of California, Berkeley,

Center for Health and Public Policy

Consumers Union Studies

Fitness Forward

Individuals

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