



Bloomington—The Misfit City

Ever get the feeling we don't fit in? We're like the newborn who got switched at the hospital and was sent home with the wrong parents. Baby Bloomington was meant to be with the enlightened Mr. and Mrs. California but instead was bundled off with regressive Mr. and Mrs. Indiana.

A year or so ago, while our then-governor and current vice president was illegally banning Syrian refugees from coming to Indiana, the Bloomington Refugee Support Network was working hard to bring them here. And while Bloomington was celebrating same-sex marriage, the state legislature was busy protecting the rights of bakeries not to make cakes for gay weddings.

Granted, there are many reasons to be proud Hoosiers, but in this decade, compassion and forward thinking are not two of them.

In February 2015, I wrote about the citizens of Berkeley, California, passing a referendum to become the first American city to tax sugary drinks. But in our (un)fair state, municipalities are not allowed to hold such referendums or impose such taxes.

Considering the power of the beverage lobby, I doubt we will see our legislature pass a sugar tax in the foreseeable future, even though Indiana is the sixth most obese state in the second most obese country in the world. Diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses associated with obesity are rampant among Hoosier adults and children.

France, Hungary, Norway, and Mexico currently tax sugary beverages; Ireland and Great Britain will begin to do so in 2018. Mexico, the world's most overweight country, imposed a beverage tax in 2014. The way things are going, the United States may soon overtake Mexico and become No. 1. This should please our obese, junk-food-loving president, who likes to put America first.

Philadelphia; San Francisco, Oakland, and Albany, California; Boulder, Colorado; Cook County,

Illinois (including Chicago); and Seattle have joined Berkeley in passing a sugar tax.

Seattle began taxing sugary drinks in June at the rate of 1.75 cents per ounce to be paid by distributors. Based on the experience in other places, the tax should reduce the consumption of sugary drinks by about 10 percent, and raise millions of dollars in revenue. In Seattle, the money is going to help working families who can't afford healthy food.

In the June 9 edition of *USA Today*, a story entitled "Obesity, inactivity could outpace smoking in cancer death risk" reported that a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* last fall "found 13 types of cancer were linked to excess body weight." Richard Wender, a physician and chief cancer control officer at the American Cancer Society, posed the question, "Who would have thought we'd ever see the day where what you eat [and how much you] exercise, could account for more cancer deaths than smoking?"

Bloomington has much in common with small cities like Berkeley and Boulder. Given the chance to improve the health of our children and raise funds to help our less fortunate neighbors, I believe Bloomington would today have a tax on sugary beverages if we were permitted to hold a referendum. Mayor John Hamilton has told me he would support such a tax.

When CNN political humorist W. Kamau Bell, who lives in Berkeley, was here performing at the Limestone Comedy Festival, he joked that on his return home he was going to make a T-shirt that read, "Berkeley, the Bloomington of California." If only it were so.

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