

National Black Church Initiative

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PRESS RELEASE

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National Black Church Initiative Comes Out in Full Support of Proposed Soda Tax

Calls Upon Its Member Churches to Boycott the Drinking of Sodas and Sugary Drinks

Washington, DC, -- For years now health officials have been decrying the effects of sweetened drinks like soda and other sugary beverages on the youth of America. Studies have shown that the consumption of such drinks can lead to obesity, diabetes and other chronic health issues in both children and adults, and yet the population continues to consume these beverages at an unhealthy rate. It is because of this that the National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a coalition of 34,000 churches across the United States, is throwing its full backing behind the proposed Soda Tax Bill. The new tax, which is one of many ways the government would help pay for the nation's health-care reform, is being proposed to the Senate by The Center for Science in the Public Interest and would place a tax on soda, certain fruit drinks, energy drinks, sports drinks and ready-to-drink teas. It would avoid putting taxes on diet beverages and fruit drinks with more than 70 percent fruit juice in them.

The Black community is one of the worst off in terms of health standards in America, and a tax on beverages would do nothing but aid in making African Americans healthier. NBCI believes that this tax would deter families from purchasing as much soda and other sugar drinks as they currently do, which in turn lead to unhealthy lifestyles. It would also make parents take a second look at the health contents of drinks when they see that they cost more. The predicted \$24 billion earned over the next four years (if the tax is three cents) would also help to support the health-care reform that the Black community so desperately needs. While personal responsibility for one's health is always the first step in leading a healthy lifestyle, NBCI believes that thanks to the soda industry's marketing and dominant grasp over the food industry further steps must be taken in order to wrench the soda pop out of our children's hands and replace it with something healthier. If that action is to make soda and other sweet drinks cost more, and thus help our

country out of debt than this action should be taken without hesitation. The National Black Church Initiative has tried desperately to work with the beverage industry – particularly the Pepsi and Coca-Cola companies – and has been rebuffed each time.

The decreased intake of sodas ties in with NBCI's upcoming Health Emergency Declaration (HED), which will help to teach the Black community health prevention through education and preventive steps to reduce diseases states that these sugary drinks bring forth. HED is a comprehensive initiative that will be affecting some 35 communities over the next five years and providing education for some 15 million African American congregants.

While higher taxes will not teach anyone a healthier lifestyle they will give parents and children a second thought about what they purchase on a tight budget. It will be HED's job to teach them about the effects of over consumption of soda and sugary drinks, especially those that contain corn syrup, but any deterrent is better than none at all. As part of this health prevention plan NBCI will be calling on all of its churches to boycott the drinking of soda and bottled water that is sold by companies who make sugary drinks. NBCI will also call upon every church to teach their congregation about the harm that consuming too much soda can cause. The beverage industry has been able to peddle liquid candy too our children for far too long without having to pay for it. They helped to cause the health crisis African Americans find themselves in and now they should have to help pay to fix it.

NBCI has three objectives:

1. To target beverage companies, and to reduce their profit margin by 30 percent over the next five years.
2. NBCI plans to go after beverage company's most profitable products, like their bottled water.
3. NBCI plans to help families cut out sugary beverages from the family budget, thus allowing them to save money and take care of other responsibilities.

Rev. Anthony Evans, President of NBCI, said, "We have taken this action because we have no option given the fact that African Americans rate of obesity is 36 percent. We can no longer be a party of silence to this continued tragedy that is unfolding in the Black community and causing the highest rates of diabetes and hypertension among our children and adults. This is why in a month and half we will be issuing an Emergency Health Declaration. We believe that the current opposition against this tax is selfish. The industry for years has gotten away with this and we will no longer be silent. I am ordering our 34,000 churches around the country to (a) preach from the pulpit against soft drinks, (b) remove any soda from their churches and (c) openly protest their local markets who peddle these obesity-related, corn syrup beverages that are causing our children to inherit serious chronic diseases before they are 30. We believe that the agreement that President Bill Clinton signed with the beverage industry was weak and served as a white horse to the industry. We will soon announce a national boycott against the beverage companies as we roll out NBCI's Health Emergency Declaration."

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a coalition of 16,000 African-American and Latino member churches works to eradicate racial disparities in health-care. In addition to our member churches, we have 18,000 sister churches. NBCI is a faith-based health organization dedicated to providing critical wellness information and preventive health screening to all of its members. The African-American community ranks first in eleven different health risk categories. NBCI's purpose is to partner with national health officials to provide health education, reduce racial health disparities, and increase access to quality health-care.