

## Confidential Document Exposes Political Double Speak of Soda Tax Proponents

The Center for Consumer Freedom [obtained a document co-authored by Rudd Center Public Policy Director Roberta Friedman](#) detailing discussions between soda tax advocates during an obesity policy symposium. The document, which was published in November 2012, is documented proof of the hidden agendas, double-speak, and “messaging” that has clouded the debate about soda taxes.

Soda tax activists like Friedman often argue that taxes should be paid to a “prevention fund.” But behind closed doors, however, she acknowledges that might not be the case.

**“... earmarking the revenue for obesity prevention is a necessity. There is always the risk, however, that if a tax is passed, the revenue would be used to fill budget deficits, especially in the current economic climate in most states.”**

At the same time, Friedman argues that some revenue could be earmarked to “involve” other special interest groups:

**“A possible strategy would be to involve those people who could benefit most from the tax, including teachers, firefighters, and police (whose salaries could be funded if the tax is only partly earmarked).”**

They say that the poor will benefit most, but they know the taxes hit poor consumers the hardest.

**“There are still some public health advocates who will not endorse taxes because of regressivity. Advocates’ need to take control of the “regressive” conversation by:**

- **Re-framing the message that the tax is not regressive (when technically it is):**
- **Enlisting the help of respected local and national leaders to publicly reinforce the idea that low-income communities stand to benefit most from the revenue ...**
- **Gaining the support of organizations which represent low-income people and communities of color. Local polls which gauge people support for taxes may help as well.”**

Friedman suggests that non-tax policy could serve to “soften the ground” to tougher taxing policies:

**“While we continue to pursue an SSB tax, advocates should turn some attention to other pricing strategies as well. What do policy experts see as the viability of these other strategies? Can and should they be pursued simultaneously, or should the less-controversial (i.e. non-tax) options be pursued first in an effort to ‘soften the ground’ for taxes?”**

Finally, the symposium participants agreed that more money would allow them to better reframe the debate on taxing soda.

**“It was agreed in the larger NPLAN symposium, as well as in this breakout session, that we are in need of significant, dedicated funding to do the research and create the resources necessary to help us frame these public health messages. They must resonate with the public and with legislators, and, to the degree possible given regional and cultural differences, be consistent across the country.”**