Study offers support for taxing soda and other junk foods

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

Want to get people to eat more salad and less junk food? Make vegetables cheaper and soda more expensive.

It’s not exactly a new idea, but a study out Tuesday offers some fresh support for those in favor of using sin taxes and subsidies to steer people toward a more healthful diet.

The study, published online by PLoS Medicine, is a meta-analysis of 32 other studies that use statistical modeling to gauge the impact of various tax and subsidy policies. Overall, it found that consumers buy less of something when the price goes up and they buy more of it when the price goes down.

For instance, for each 1 percent increase in the price of a carbonated soft drink, consumption was predicted to fall by 0.02 percent. When it comes to saturated fat, a tax that raised the price by 1 percent was also predicted to reduce consumption by 0.02 percent.

But there was a twist: The tax would prompt people to switch from fatty dairy foods to foods that were higher in salt, sugar and total calories, undermining the reason for the tax in the first place.

On the flip side, mathematical models predicted that reducing the prices of fruits and vegetables by 1 percent would lead to a 0.35 percent increase in consumption, the meta-analysis found. Two of the studies suggested that a subsidy for high-fiber foods would translate into lower consumption of foods that have a lot of saturated fat.

But some models also predicted that if produce became cheaper, people would wind up eating less fish too.

Influencing what shoppers put in their shopping carts is only part of the battle. At the end of the day, the goal of any tax or subsidy is to make people healthier. On this score, some of the models are even less encouraging.

Three studies in the meta-analysis attempted to make a connection between taxes and health, and their combined estimate was that a tax on dairy foods high in saturated fat would lead to an increase in death due to cardiovascular and coronary heart disease. In addition, taxes targeting junk foods in general had the unintended consequence of causing more deaths due to stroke and cardiovascular disease.

In both cases, the study authors wrote, it wasn't that eating less saturated fat or junk food made people unhealthy; whatever they were eating instead of the taxed foods was to blame.

Subsidies seemed to be better than taxes at promoting good health. Two of the three studies examining the health outcomes of fruit and vegetable subsidies predicted a reduction in premature deaths due to cardiovascular or coronary heart disease, stroke or cancer.

It's important to remember that mathematical models can go only so far in predicting real-world outcomes. And there are some real-world experiments involving food taxes and subsidies that bear watching, according to the study authors:

—Denmark has implemented a tax that's the equivalent of $3.13 per kilogram of saturated fat on foods whose saturated fat content exceeds 2.3 percent.

—France levies a tax of 0.036 euros (5 cents) per liter of sweetened beverages.

—Hungary has introduced a flat tax of 10 forints (5 cents) per food item that’s high in total fat, sugar and salt.

The health benefits (if any) of these policies have not yet been evaluated. Studies are sure to come, but even if these countries were to find that fewer of their citizens are dying of heart attacks or diabetes, there’s always some guesswork involved in figuring out how much credit should go to the taxes.

This is not a problem American researchers will have to deal with soon. Proposals to tax unhealthful foods are routinely vilified as “nanny state” initiatives that impinge on consumers’ right to eat as many Flamin’ Hot Cheetos as they’d like, and wash them down with gallons of Orange Crush. Just last month, voters in El Monte and Richmond rejected measures to tax sugary drinks in the name of good health.

Letter: LTVA thanks community for great tree lighting event

To the community,

The Community Holiday Tree lighting, recently held at the Lake Tahoe Visitor Center, was a huge success with approximately 350 people enjoying the festivities.

This is an annual event that the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority sponsors to spread holiday cheer in the community.

Thank you to all who supported this event. Lake DJ, South Lake Tahoe Senior Center, Mr. Paul Kushner and the South Lake Tahoe Children’s Choral Society, Santa and his Elves, Borges Sleigh

Rides, Temple Bat Yam, Sierra-at-Tahoe, Liberty Utilities, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority staff and the Tahoe Chamber staff.

See you next year.

Anne Sutterfield, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority

South Lake Tahoe City Council agrees to raise garbage rates, install parking meters

By Kathryn Reed

Tuesday was a day of 4-1 votes. The first involved garbage rates and two were about paid parking in South Lake Tahoe.

JoAnn Conner on her first day as a member of the South Lake Tahoe City Council voted against the 1.57 percent South Tahoe Refuse hike. The increase will be effective Jan. 1.

For most residents it means the current monthly rate of $24.33 will now become $24.71.

Conner believes with the decrease in residents and people having a hard time making ends meet, that this is not the time for an increase. The other council members were not thrilled with the increase, but agreed to it.



The South Lake Tahoe City Council – JoAnn Conner, Hal Cole, Tom Davis, Angela Swanson, Claire Fortier. Photo/LTN

The garbage company per the franchise agreement may ask for rate hikes every three years that have to do with all sorts of factors. But the one granted Tuesday had to do with the consumer price index. STR may ask for hikes based on the CPI in the interim years.

However, rates did just go up May 1. This was actually a delay from Jan. 1, which is the date the company had wanted for that increase. But the city, along with El Dorado and Douglas counties were in talks to get their rate adjustment times in alignment. In May, fees went up 4.48 percent in El Dorado County, and 4.97 percent in South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County.

El Dorado County supervisors have already approved the latest increase. Douglas County commissioners are set to vote on it Dec. 20.

Another money related issue on the agenda involved putting in parking meters at various locations in the city.

Parking issues in South Lake Tahoe are driving a wedge between residents and somewhat between council members.

Two votes were taken at the Dec. 11 meeting with Mayor Tom Davis casting the lone dissenting vote each time.

Ultimately the ordinance the council approved in November

regarding parking meters is intact except there won't be any meters on Ski Run Boulevard from Highway 50 to Pioneer Trail.

On Jan. 8 the council is expected to revise the ordinance to add meters on Ski Run from Pioneer Trail to Saddle Road and along Paradise Road, and to identify neighborhoods that should have permitted parking.

Sixteen people spoke at the meeting and three letters were read into the record.

The views ranged from this is the worst time to do something like this to do it now because there is never a good time. Some believe it will hurt businesses, while others said the meters could help turn over business. Others said it would just hurt locals. The counter argument was locals need to pay for the areas they use, just like tourists.

In other action:

• Davis is now mayor of South Lake Tahoe and Hal Cole is mayor pro tem.

• Conner was sworn in as a new councilmember after Bruce Grego said his goodbyes.

Opinion: Precautions can make for safe holiday season

By Tia Rancourt

The winter holidays are a time for celebration – and that

means more cooking, decorating, entertaining and overall increased risk of fire due to heating equipment.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency, between 2005-09, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 240 home fires that started with Christmas trees per year. These fires caused an average of 13 deaths, 27 injuries, and $16.7 million in direct property damage annually.

There are simple life-saving steps you can take to create a safe and happy holiday.

Preventing Christmas tree fires:

o Selecting a tree for the holiday – When buying a live tree, look for one that is not shedding needles. If needles fall off or branches snap when bent, the tree is already too dry.

o Keep trees watered. A mixture of lemon-lime soda and water will keep a tree moist longer.

o Keep trees away from all heat sources including fire places, stoves and room/space heaters.

o When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label “fire resistant”.

o Secure the tree firmly in tree stand to keep it from toppling over.

o When tree becomes dry, promptly discard it. Please consider using the IVGID Waste Not Free Holiday Tree Recycling Program.

Lights and candles:

o Please do not use candles on a Christmas tree.

o Place candles where they will not be knocked down.

o Keep candles away from curious pets and children’s reach.

o Be extremely careful with candles that have leaves, flowers, pine cones or other decorative items cast into them. These items can become wicks and ignite the candle in a way that the candle is not designed.

o Keep lights or candles away from anything that could easily catch fire. (NFPA reports that half of home candles fires occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to the candle.)

o Please do not leave holiday lights or candles unattended.

o Inspect all lights and cords before using them. Discard all lights with cracked or broken wiring and never overload circuits.

Holiday decorations:

o Keep wrapping paper and ribbons away from heat sources. This includes candles, lights, fireplaces, stoves and heaters.

o Wrapping paper and ribbon should be thrown away in trash containers, not fireplaces. Burning paper and ribbon could cause a chimney fire.

o Put decorations high enough on the tree so your child or pet can’t reach them. Children can choke or cut themselves on ornaments or ornament hangers.

o Holly and mistletoe are poisonous. Keep them away from children.

o Use only nonflammable or flame-retardant decorations and place away from heat vents.

o If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame-retardant.

Watch what you heat:

o Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling or

broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.

o If you are simmering, baking, roasting or boiling food, check it regularly and use a timer to remind you that you're cooking.

o If you are using a turkey fryer, please follow the manufacturer's guidelines and instructions, and remember that the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) has chosen not to certify any turkey fryers with the UL mark because they consider them to be dangerous to use presenting numerous safety hazards to consumers.

Fireplace safety:

o Check and clean the fireplace and chimney every year.

o Always put logs and newspapers on a grate inside fireplace and use a fireplace screen.

o Please do not use gasoline, lighter fluid or kerosene to start a fire and make sure the fire you build "fits" your fireplace (use an appropriate amount of newspaper and logs).

o Place completely cooled ashes in a metal container. Keep metal container outside away from the house in a safe place.

Give holiday gifts that promote fire safety:

o Smoke alarms. If a fire occurs, having a smoke alarm cuts the chance of dying by half.

o Carbon monoxide detectors – helps detect carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas.

o Flashlights for emergency lighting instead of candles, to avoid the risk of fire from an open flame.

o Sturdy candleholders to prevent tip-over when candles are lit.

o Sturdy fireplace screen, to keep embers out of the room.

o Gift certificates for chimney cleaning can reduce oily creosote build-up in chimneys that can be easily ignited.

o Portable fire extinguishers, with clear instructions on how to use them.

o Oven mitts for handling cooking equipment.

o House address numbers – our local ordinance requires 6 inch for residential and 12 inch for commercial structures.

Tia Rancourt works for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Homewood Mountain Resort opens Dec. 14.

• New owners Juan and Loreen Sanchez are reopening Burger Lounge in South Lake Tahoe on Dec. 15 with a new menu.

• Livability.com named Reno one of the top 10 Winter Vacation Destinations.

• Due to lack of snow, the Lake Tahoe Nordic Festival will be postponed to early 2013.

• Sally Jones has been hired as the manager of the Tahoe Donner Cross Country Ski Area.

South Lake Tahoe hires interim fire chief

South Lake Tahoe has a new fire chief. At least for now.

Bruce Martin was introduced at the Dec. 11 council meeting. He will be working on an interim basis through June 30.

In the 2012-13 budget the council had allocated funds for a deputy public safety director. Martin takes on that title under Police Chief Brian Uhler, but at the same time takes over the fire department. Uhler for about the last year had been chief of both departments.



Bruce Martin

Martin retired as chief of the Fremont Fire Department in June. He and his wife have already rented a house in the city.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said fire staff helped decide to bring Martin on board.

What she told *Lake Tahoe News* that she likes about Martin is his leadership capabilities.

Kerry said hiring an interim would give the city time to figure out what to do in the long term in regards to management at the fire department.

– Kathryn Reed

Ski Report: Winter storm blowing in

The National Weather Service has issued a winter weather advisory for the Lake Tahoe area for the 24-hour period starting at 10pm Tuesday.

Expect about a half foot at the lake and a foot or more above 7,000 feet. The wind will be picking up, too.

Here is the Dec. 11 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

LTN making upgrades; news will be delayed

Lake Tahoe News will be undergoing some maintenance starting this evening that will impact the delivery of news. It could take a few hours, it could take more than 24 hours, maybe longer depending on how things go.

So, don't be alarmed when you wake up and the same old stuff is on the site. We'll start the flow of news as soon as possible. The site will be up, but nothing will be posted. It's possible during this time any comments that are made will not be seen and could be lost.

So, go enjoy Tahoe and check back in with *Lake Tahoe News* late Tuesday to see if the IT gang has done its job so the rest of us can get back to doing ours.

In the mean time, any breaking news will be posted via Twitter and on our Facebook page.

As with any change, there can be some hiccups and burps along the way, so please be patient.

Thank you for understanding and being such great supporters of *Lake Tahoe News*.

– Kathryn Reed, LTN publisher

State looking for taxpayers

to give money to

By Claudia Buck, Sacramento Bee

Missing your state tax refund? Nearly 48,000 California taxpayers, with refunds totaling $14 million, have checks that can’t be delivered, the state Franchise Tax Board said Monday.

The refunds, ranging from $1 to $35,000, were returned as “undeliverable” by the U.S. Postal Service.

“The biggest problem is people move and don’t change their address (with the FTB),” said FTB spokeswoman Denise Azimi.

In the four-county area, the number of residents and the total amount of refunds are: El Dorado, 172 refunds for $41,400; Placer, 216 for $80,700; Sacramento, 1,147 for $262,400; Yolo, 160 for $53,000.

To check your refund status or update an address, call the FTB at 800.852.5711.

Once an address is updated, the FTB will reissue the refund.

Study: Federal agencies ignore public’s right to

information

By Josh Hicks, Washington Post

President Obama promised a more transparent government on Day One of his first term, and his attorney general issued a memorandum less than two months later urging all heads of executive departments to err on the side of openness when it comes to disclosure.

But an audit by the George Washington University-based National Security Archive has found that nearly 70 percent of government agencies haven’t updated their Freedom of Information regulations since Eric Holder sent out that letter, and well over half haven’t done so since Congress and President George W. Bush approved the Open Government Act of 2007, which mandated certain changes.

The study also found that 17 out of 99 agencies have not properly posted their regulations on their FOIA websites, as required by the Electronic FOIA Amendments law of 1996.

The National Security Archive sent FOIA requests asking those 17 agencies for their FOIA regulations, but only seven responded after three months. The law requires agencies to respond within 20 business days.

The archive noted that even among agencies that have updated their FOIA regulations, the new guidelines do not always reflect the law or the president’s pledge.

Tom Blanton, the archive’s director, said during an interview that the audit findings “demonstrate with some tangible measures the level of bureaucratic resistance to open government.” But he described the lack of agency compliance as more of an opportunity for executive action rather than a condemnation of the Obama administration.

“Outdated agency regulations really mean there’s an opportunity here for a second-term Obama to standardize best practices and bring all the agencies up to his day-one openness pledge,” Blanton said in a statement posted on the archive’s website.

The National Security Archive is a nonprofit institution that collects and publishes declassified U.S. government files, especially those relating to U.S. foreign policy. It claims to file more FOIA requests than any other group.