BACKGROUND  In 2012, New York City’s Mayor Bloomberg pushed for a law limiting soft-drink sizes as part of his focus on public health. The law won the approval of the city’s Board of Health, but industry groups claimed it was illegal because it interfered with consumers’ choices. A judge ruled against the law because it excluded certain businesses and did not apply to all beverages.

Ban the Ban!

1. When Mayor Bloomberg implemented laws banning smoking in bars, parks and restaurants, that made sense. Whether or not I agreed, I understood the rationale because other people’s health would inadvertently be impacted by the smoke. When he insisted on calorie counts being posted, I think many of us cringed but, again, it made sense. If you want to know how many calories something is before you indulge, it is now spelled out for you. On days when you feel like being especially naughty, you just don’t look and order it anyway! That’s what life is all about, isn’t it? Choices. Informed decisions. I respect being given information that enables me to make an informed decision. What I do not respect is having my civil liberties stripped away.

2. When you take away the option to order a soda over a certain size, you have now removed my options. I no longer have a choice. That is not what this country is all about. I agree wholeheartedly that obesity is an issue that needs to be addressed. It is one that needs to be addressed with education, compassion and support, not government mandates. If, despite all those efforts, someone chooses to have a sugary drink anyway, that is their choice and their right. If they know all the facts and they do it anyway, that is a personal choice. It is not the place of our elected officials to intervene.

3. We cannot allow our government to make these kinds of decisions for us. I have said it before and I will say it again, once you allow the government to make choices on your behalf, it becomes a very slippery slope. I, personally, feel that it goes against everything this country stands for—we are a country built on freedom. That includes basic freedoms like what you are going to drink while watching a movie, and eating what will soon be un-buttered and un-salted popcorn, according to Mayor Bloomberg. Remember the days when New York was a really cool and fun place.
to live? Me too. Now a simple thing like going to the movies has even lost its “flavor.”

The people of New York need to show our mayor that money can’t buy him everything. He says he’s going to “fight back” to get this pushed through. Well, it is our responsibility to fight back too. People might think it is not important because it is just soda but it is so much more than that—it is about freedom and the freedom to make your own decisions about what you do and what you put into your bodies. It started with soda and he has already moved on to salt. What is going to be next? If you’re reading this and you are not a New Yorker, don’t think you are not going to be affected. You will! It starts here and it will spread throughout the nation. I hope you will all start to speak up about this issue or, before you know it, it won’t be the “land of the free and home of the brave” anymore. One day in the not too distant future we are all going to wake up in the land of “Big Brother” with a list of things we can and cannot do, eat, drink, say, and so on, and we’ll be wondering how we got there. Well, this is how.

Soda’s a Problem but . . .

The intentions of New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg may be laudable, but it’s wrong for one man, even an elected official and even a well-meaning one at that, to dictate to people how big a cup of sugary soda they’re allowed.

Not that I have tremendous regard for soda. It’s bad for you, especially in large quantities. The evidence against it mounts on a semi-regular basis. But the mayor’s initiative goes further than something like a soda tax, which might aim to discourage people from purchasing something by making it cost a bit more but leaves the decision in their hands. Bloomberg is playing nanny in the worst sort of way by interfering in a basic, private transaction involving a perfectly legal substance. In restaurants and other establishments overseen by the city’s health inspectors, it would have been illegal to sell a serving of most sugary drinks (except fruit juice; I always wonder about that exemption) that’s more than 16 ounces.

Convenience stores such as 7-Eleven are overseen by the state and would be exempt, but a Burger King across the street would be restricted. A pizza restaurant would not be able to sell a 2-liter bottle of soda that would be shared out among the children at a birthday party. But they could all have a 16-ounce cup. The inherent contradictions that make it easy to sneer at such rules have been well-reported and were a good part of why earlier this week a judge stopped the new rules from being implemented. But he also pointed out a deeper problem: Bloomberg essentially made this decision himself. It was approved by the Board of Health, but that’s a board of the administration, appointed by the mayor. That was an overreach that thwarted the system of checks and balances,

1. the land of “Big Brother” place in which the government or another organization exercises total control over people’s lives; the term Big Brother was coined by George Orwell in his famous dystopian novel, 1984.
according to the judge: The separately elected City Council would have to approve the law.

That still leaves the question of whether governments or their leaders can begin dictating the look of an individual’s meal, the portion sizes for each aspect. There are times when government has to step in on obviously dangerous situations—especially those, such as smoking, that affect people other than the person whose behavior would be curbed—but it’s my belief that we want to scrutinize them carefully and keep them to a minimum. For that matter, it’s not as though the mayor is moving to limit sales of tobacco to two cigarettes per transaction.

Not that government has to aid and abet the situation. Schools don’t have to sell junk foods, and, thankfully, after years of sacrificing their students’ health to their desire to raise more money, most of them have stopped allowing vending machines stocked with sodas. Governments are under no obligation to sell such stuff in park or pool vending machines or in their offices. In such cases, government is simply the vendor making a decision about what it wants to sell.

I don’t buy the argument that people are helpless in the face of sugar and that it’s better to have the government rather than the corporations dictate their behaviors. If people are so helpless against soda, the mayor’s edict would be even more meaningless because people would simply buy two 16-ounce cups. But people are not helpless, and it’s worrisome to promote a philosophy that infantilizes the individual. The public is simply ill-informed. It takes a while for people to become aware, but they do and they react. Soda consumption already is slipping nationwide.

Let’s not forget that scientists and even governments have at times pushed people—with better intentions than food corporations, certainly—into eating high levels of refined carbohydrates and sugars by sending out word that the only thing that really matters when it comes to obesity is to eat a very low-fat diet.

Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first review.

1. Who is Michael Bloomberg?

2. According to the author of “Ban the Ban!,” what is “life all about”?

3. What does the author of “Soda’s a Problem but...” think of the argument that “people are helpless in the face of sugar”?