**Toulmin Argumentation Model Quiz**

The passage below is a short piece arguing in support of a US "junk food tax." Read through the piece and look for the different parts of Toulmin's model.

Your task is to read the article, answer the questions below the passage. Does the piece offer strong evidence, backing, rebuttal and qualification to support its claim?

With the alarming rise in obesity rates among Americans in the past few decades, numerous debates have arisen over how (or if) public policy should be changed to help improve this trend. One promising strategy, already adopted by seven states, has been to try and deter consumers from purchasing unhealthy foods through a tax on soda or sugary drinks and junk food (Lohman, 2002). These taxes address the issue that Americans today are consuming almost 20% more calories than they did in the early 1980’s, and those calories are coming from increasingly less-healthy sources, mainly high-fat and high-sugar processed foods (USDA, 2002). Furthermore, processed foods and drinks are increasingly more affordable than the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains needed to sustain a healthy diet (Marsh, 2011). Assuming that cost is a more pertinent factor of food choice than personal taste, increasing the price of soda and junk food through taxes, while using that revenue to subsidize unprocessed fruits and vegetables would entice consumers to choose healthier products as they become more affordable than their unhealthy counterparts.

There is evidence to suggest that cost, more so than preference, influences purchasing choices. A year after New York increased cigarette taxes from $1.25 to $2.75, smoking rates dropped by 12% to a historic low (Harutyunyan, 2009). Although some might argue that smoking is more of a lifestyle choice than eating, it is rather the choice of what foods to eat which will hopefully be affected in the long run. Additionally, this tax might hurt those in areas with little access to fresh produce and whole grains, such as in low-income urban areas; therefore the “junk food tax” would only work if healthy food choices are made not only affordable but easily available to low-income consumers through the use of subsidies (Marsh, 2011). However, if precautions are taken to ensure equal access to healthy food among all citizens, then using the “carrot” of subsidized healthy food and nutrition education along with the “stick” of a food tax, the typical American diet can-- and should-- be changed for the better.

References (APA citation style):

1. Harutyunyan, R. (June 6, 2009). “Cigarette Tax Increase Lowered NY Smoking Rates.” *EmaxHealth*. Retrieved from http://www.emaxhealth.com/2/58/31581/cigarette-tax-increase-lowered-ny-smoking-rates.html
2. Lohman, J. (2002). Taxes on junk food. Washington DC: Office of Legislative Research. http://www.cga.ct.gov/2002/olrdata/fin/rpt/2002-r-1004.htm
3. Marsh, B. (July 23, 2011). “Bad Food? Tax It, and Subsidize Vegetables.” *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/opinion/sunday/24bittman.html?pagewanted=all
4. US Department of Agriculture (2002). Profiling food consumption in America. In *Agriculture Factbook: 2001-2002*. Retrieved from http://www.usda.gov/factbook/chapter2.htm

**Answer these questions:**

1. What is the author's claim in this piece?
2. Where does the author present evidence in this piece?
3. What is the warrant in this piece? Is it stated explicitly?
4. Where does the author present backing for her warrant?
5. Does the author rebut possible counterarguments?
6. How does the author qualify her claim?
7. How would you judge the quality of this argument? Do you think that the author provided strong evidence which is supported by the warrant and backing? How well did the author address possible counterarguments and qualify her claim?

Answers:

1. The claim is stated in two places-- at the beginning of the piece, when the author states that the tax is a promising strategy against obesity. The claim is re-stated at the end, when the author writes, “using the carrot of subsidized healthy food and nutrition education along with the stick of a food tax, the typical American diet can, and should, be changed for the better.” These two statements condense the main point which the author is trying to impart-- that a junk food tax has a good chance of being successful and should be implemented.
2. The main evidence to support her claim is given in the form of statistics about food consumption in the US to highlight the need for a program encouraging healthy food consumption. Specifically, she states, “Americans today are consuming almost 20% more calories than they did in the early 1980’s, and those calories are coming from increasingly less-healthy sources, mainly high-fat and high-sugar processed foods. Furthermore, processed foods and drinks are increasingly more affordable than the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains needed to sustain a healthy diet.”
3. Because the author is arguing that a tax on unhealthy food would encourage healthy food consumption, the warrant linking evidence of unhealthy eating to the use of a food tax is that customers make purchasing decisions largely on the basis of cost. This idea is explicitly stated when the author writes mentions that we might assume, “… cost is a more pertinent factor of food choice than personal taste.”
4. The author cites backing for the warrant through the effects of cigarette taxes on smoking habits in New York. Specifically, she writes that, “… a year after New York increased cigarette taxes from $1.25 to $2.75, smoking rates dropped by 12% to a historic low”(Harutyunyan, 2009).
5. Yes, the author addresses two possible counterarguments by bringing them up, and then refuting them. She notes that with regard to the legitimacy of comparing smoking to eating habits, “some might argue that smoking is more of a lifestyle choice than eating, it is rather the choice of what foods to eat which will hopefully be affected in the long run*.* She also notes the issue of food deserts by writing, “…additionally, this tax might hurt those in areas with little access to fresh produce and whole grains, such as in low-income urban areas; therefore the ‘junk food tax’ would only work if healthy food choices are made not only affordable but easily available to low-income consumers through the use of subsidies” (Marsh, 2011).