Two cities in California—San Francisco and Berkeley—will be presenting voters with soda-tax initiatives in the upcoming November election. Soda and sugar-sweetened drinks such as sports drinks and energy drinks would be taxed, although infant formula, nutritional drinks, and diet drinks would not be taxed. Michael F. Jacobson, the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said in an article in the New York Times that the soda industry has spent over $117 million since 2009 to combat soda taxes in the United States and is now paying attention to San Francisco and Berkeley.

In San Francisco, the proposed tax is 2 cents per ounce. Because revenues from the tax would go into a specific fund for nutrition and health programs, the initiative must be approved by two-thirds of the electorate rather than a simple majority. The beverage industry claims that the tax will negatively affect lower income families and has spent $7.7 million in San Francisco to defeat the initiative. Supporters of the tax look to studies showing that such a tax could decrease soda consumption by ten percent and reduce associated cases of diabetes. However, supporters have only raised $260,000, and Roger Salazar from the beverage industry told the New York Times, “We feel pretty confident we can beat it in San Francisco. Berkeley is a lot tougher.”

In Berkeley, the proposed tax, Measure D, would tax sugary drinks at one-cent per ounce and is intended to promote public health by reducing consumption of sugary drinks. Measure D only requires a majority to pass. Although the beverage industry has spent $1.4 million to combat the measure and supporters have only raised $135,600, Scott Weiner from the board of supervisors supporting the tax said in an article in the New York Times, “We know we have a fight on our hands. But we believe we have the strongest chance yet of being able to pass this. This is a city that really cares about public health and has always been on the cutting edge of addressing health problems.”

Other states and cities have proposed soda taxes in the past, including California, Illinois, New York City and West Virginia, although most have failed to pass. More information can be found in CSG's 2014 Capitol Research Brief here.