Say “Cigarette Tax Increase” around a group of medical professionals and you get a room full of cheers. It is an idea that you have been touting for years. You’ve seen firsthand the devastating effects smoking has on people. Every day you do your part to inform the public of the dangers of smoking and what is out there to help them quit. However, you can only do so much to have an impact. You know raising the cigarette tax is a commonsense solution to a problem that has a huge impact on the health and the pocketbook of the state of Wisconsin.

Say “Cigarette Tax Increase” around the State Capitol and the room goes silent. Tax is a four letter word. The halls are still echoing with promises of “no new taxes.” Each side is preparing their literature pieces excited about the opportunity to win a seat by saying how the incumbent voted for a huge tax increase. While this may seem like a no-win situation, it isn’t.

Slowly but surely this is an issue that is gaining momentum and support. While there are some legislators who publicly support a cigarette tax increase, there are many more legislators who support the issue but aren’t ready to go public. It is important that we keep the dialogue on this issue going so that they can see this is an issue that’s time has come.

It is time to for us all to have an honest conversation about the health of our kids and all Wisconsinites. We must get legislators and the public to focus on the fact that this tax is about stopping kids from smoking, and saving money in the long term, not about raising taxes or trying to win a campaign.

If the cigarette tax increase goes through, these are the results you would see:
- Over 76,000 kids not picking up this habit
- 13,000 current youth smokers quitting
- 35,900 adult smokers quitting
- A reduction in the $1.58 billion annually being spent by the state on health care costs directly caused by smoking
- $220 million being saved by the state in health care costs in the long run

A recent poll showed that a majority of Wisconsin’s voters—77%—favor a $1 per pack hike in the cigarette tax with the revenues devoted to health care programs. The Wisconsin public seems to understand better than the legislators the devastating effects of tobacco and the need to aggressively discourage its use. Therefore, it is up to people like you to do what you can to educate legislators on the importance and the effects of a cigarette tax increase. I can’t encourage you enough to contact your legislator, and tell your patients to contact their legislators, because in the end, it will be the public that convinces elected politicians that this is right for Wisconsin.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Rep.Hines@legis.state.wi.us or 888.534.0042.

State Representative J.A. Hines of Oxford is a Republican who represents Wisconsin’s 42nd Assembly District. Hines is the author of legislation to increase Wisconsin’s cigarette excise tax by $1 per pack.
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