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**SECTION:** EDITORIAL ; Pg. B2**LENGTH:** 1319 words**HEADLINE:** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: SHOULD **VOTERS APPROVE CIGARETTE TAX?****BODY:**

NO

The proposed 55-cent-per-pack cigarette tax increase will not benefit the people it is supposed to. This is a regressive tax, meaning that the people who can least afford it will wind up paying it.

These are the families who fall into the low- to moderate-income category, who make up the majority of the smokers in Missouri.

This tax will cost a family with two smokers, one carton a week, approximately \$614 a year (\$52 a month) in additional taxes (including sales tax) This would be an additional 2.5 percent of the gross income of a family making \$24,000 a year.

These additional taxes for some families may result in a decision between new clothes, food or an extracurricular activity for the children of these families. The primary beneficiaries of this money will be the medical, medical research and insurance companies. The benefit to low- or moderate-income families in Missouri will be minimal.

Lonnie Vang

Waynesville, Mo.

I am a non-smoker who intends to vote against Proposition A, the tax on cigarettes. I am aware of the health claims being made by the Prop A supporters , and I am also aware of how their statistics are based on dubious extrapolations.

However, my opposition is mainly based on the mind-set driving the Prop A people. They do not like smoking, and so they wish to tax it out of existence. After smoking, and already looming on the political horizon, will be a tax on fast foods, again based on health concerns. There is no limit on the number and amount of taxes that be can levied out of a concern for others' well-being.

This mind-set is seeking to purge from society what it does not approve of. Long ago, Chief Justice John Marshall said, "The power to tax involves the power to destroy." We are now seeing the application of that principle.

Larry Chambers

Maplewood

I wonder who decided that 55 cents a pack was a good number to use in increasing the tax on cigarettes. If the forces behind this tax increase had purely good intentions, they would have proposed a much larger increase.

This proposal is simply a grab by the state for more money. The driving forces behind this know that a majority of the voters will believe anything and will vote in favor of it as long as they are not affected. This is called the "baa-baa"

syndrome.

Passage of the cigarette tax increase will open endless possibilities to our legislators. Perhaps old people should be taxed more because they are a drain on health care resources.

Why would we allow our government to pit one group against another?

Margaret M. Mack

Florissant

YES

Health-care professionals know from firsthand experience that smoking and tobacco use pose significant health risks.

BJC HealthCare supports programs to help both children and adults who are addicted to nicotine beat the habit. As health advocates, we also support passage of Proposition A, to add a 55-cent tax to packs of cigarettes and a 20 percent tax to other tobacco products.

Studies have found that when cigarette prices increase by 10 percent, youth smoking rates decline by 7 percent and adult smoking drops by 4 percent.

In addition to harmful effects on individuals, tobacco use increases health-care costs. Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calculated that the costs associated with smoking-related medical care and lost productivity average \$7 per pack of cigarettes.

If the Missouri ballot measure passes, the state would realize an estimated \$342 million in additional revenue, targeted to important health-care causes.

Steven H. Lipstein

President and Chief Executive Officer

BJC HealthCare

St. Louis

In the St. Louis area, we have witnessed the closure of hospital emergency departments and the shrinkage in the number of hospitals willing to provide trauma care. We have watched as ConnectCare teeters on the brink of extinction.

Passage of Proposition A will provide critically needed funding to mend our rapidly unraveling medical safety net. Through a modest increase in the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products, Proposition A will fund improved health care access, hospital trauma care, and hospital emergency preparedness, as well as life sciences research, anti-smoking education, and early childhood education.

Even with this tax increase, Missouri's tobacco tax will still be 27 percent lower than in Illinois and lower than in most other states.

Michael E. Mullins, M.D.

Webster Groves

By voting for Proposition A, Missourians can potentially discourage 50,000 underage kids from starting to smoke and prevent about 16,000 deaths from that same age bracket.

Opponents of the tax say the state is "just looking for a golden goose in tough budget times." I have a hard time believing that our top officials will take the extra taxes and spend it on other things than they say they will. And I strongly disagree that the health care fund will not benefit many more people with smoking-caused diseases or sicknesses.

Yes, people should live with their own bad habits, but we should try to discourage young people from taking up those bad habits in the first place. This is what Prop A will do for our youth.

Jon Hinthorne

Ballwin

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Carnahan compiles a partisan record

It must be easy to be an editorial writer for the Post-Dispatch. Just call the Democratic National Committee and tell them how many columns to fill. Your idea of "middle of the road" is so far to the left that it barely qualifies as a sidewalk. Case in point is your endorsement of Jean Carnahan.

How does Carnahan bridge the partisan gap when she votes against the fellow Missourian John Ashcroft as attorney general?

When you state that "centrist" Carnahan voted with the president 71 percent of the time, you neglect to break that number down to pre-9/11 and post-9/11. When you do this, you see that what you have is not a centrist at all, but just another party hack.

I fully support Talent's position on major issues. Instead of more gun control, enforce the existing laws. I have yet to find infanticide listed as a guaranteed constitutional right. I believe that judicial nominations should be held in a prompt and expedient manner. As for the estate tax, from what I can tell, the money in the estate has already been taxed. To tax that amount again flies in the face of all that is fair. If the scare tactics used to oppose Arctic drilling were true, Texas would be uninhabitable.

What the Post-Dispatch views as middle of the road is, in my opinion, very slanted toward the liberal left.

Douglas Meyer

Florissant

I plan to vote for Jim Talent due to his legislative experience and proven ability to get things done.

Vote for Jim Talent if you hunt and wish to retain your Second Amendment right to own and keep firearms. He believes that people, not firearms, commit violent crimes and that the "right of the people to keep and bear arms" should be protected from government restrictions.

Sen. Jean Carnahan supports restrictive anti-gun laws and strongly opposes the "right to carry" for properly trained law-abiding citizens.

Ed Graybael

Barnhart

Favoring the wealthy

Jim Talent speaks of a "death tax" as if the estate tax were an unjust intrusion of "big government" beyond this lifetime. He would be closer to the truth if he called it a "billionaire tax," as only a small minority of people pay this tax. And of those who pay, only a minority are small-business owners or farmers.

With a budget surplus transformed into a massive deficit within a year by slashing taxes for the rich, it is appalling that Talent prefers to foster a wealthy ruling-class system in America while the middle class worries about its jobs, its retirement funds and sending their sons to war (a bona fide death tax) - problems that the major beneficiaries of estate tax repeal are unlikely ever to face.

Tom Videen

Webster Groves

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