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The **Boston Globe****September 30, 1992, Wednesday, City Edition****SECTION:** OP-ED; Pg. 17**LENGTH:** 726 words**HEADLINE:** A small tax to extinguish a big problem;
DERRICK JACKSON**BYLINE:** By Derrick **Jackson**, Globe Staff**BODY:**

Why stop at a cigarette tax of 25 cents? Why not 50 cents? A dollar! Send the price of a pack through the roof. Make it feel the way it ought to feel. Bad on the wallet. Unnecessary. Foolish. Hey, why am I spending so much to kill myself? But 25 cents, as asked for on Question 1 by state health professionals, is a good start. It must be. When you see Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds and the tobacco traffickers do the freak and threaten to throw down \$ 10 million to get on TV and telephones to tell you to vote no, you know we are onto something good. When big tobacco's local front man, Paul Pezzella, says, Oh my, this regressive tax will hurt the poor and the working class, I smell jive turkey. When is the last time a politician pandered to the poor?

Pezzella, a former top aide to Gov. Michael Dukakis, is right that this tax will make cigarettes less affordable for low-income people. Thank goodness. These are the people big tobacco preys on to smoke more.

Where do you see all the cigarette billboards? It ain't Wellesley, honey. It is Roxbury, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester and Lawrence. Who was supposed to buy Uptown cigarettes? African-Americans. Who is supposed to buy Dakota? Working-class women. Who attends Marlboro auto races? Working-class white men. Whom do those jazzy Camel ads attract? Teen-agers. Big tobacco will never complain about bilingual education. Latino storefronts are plastered with Newport and Marlboro stickers in Spanish. Poor folks matter to Pezzella. They give him human fodder for his \$ 120,000-a-year pimp detail. The US Office of Smoking and Health says 26 and 27 percent of white-collar men and women, respectively, smoke cigarettes, compared with 42 and 37 percent of blue-collar men and women. Among African-American blue-collar men, 52 percent smoke. While 17 percent of both male and female high school students reported having smoked in the previous week, 52 percent of male dropouts and 33 percent of female dropouts smoked.

The 25-cent tax is a way the voter can truly help the working class, help them stand up to big money. The tobacco cartel spent \$ 23 million in California in 1988 to defeat a 25-cent tax and lost. This is a drug war where you can help people just say no. Smoking dropped 17 percent in California after the tax was imposed.

Big tobacco cannot win on any reasoned level. It says the state will lose \$ 215 million a year in sales to border states. The bigger state loss is the \$ 1.5 billion a year in wasted health costs from smoking. Big tobacco paints the health lobby as tax-crazed liberals while it has bled poor folks dry with its own price increases. The profit margin of cigarettes is so high that a rise of just 1 percent in volume this spring boosted RJR's US revenues by 10 percent.

Tobacco's only moral force is cash. It spent \$ 4 billion on advertising and promotion in 1990. That would almost fully fund Head Start. That is more than what the United States gave in foreign aid in 1990 to Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. That is more than the spending on city services for San Francisco, Philadelphia or Chicago. That is 35 times what the United States spends to research the effects of smoking and educate the public about them.

Big tobacco cares about poor and working folks just enough to twist their priorities. Families in the bottom fifth of income levels spend 8 percent of their money on cigarettes, compared with 1 percent for the top fifth. I have seen a

mother put back a can of baby formula in a store to buy cigarettes. Once my wife and I were stranded in a snowstorm on a bus. Smokers lit up. A baby had an asthma attack. My wife, a doctor, asked people to stop smoking. No one did. People hollered, "We need it!"

I think about the young men who deleadaded our house last year. For deleadading, they used special air machines and covered the house in plastic. Their gleaming, bulky, white protective suits and air masks made them look like astronauts. At break time, they whipped off the masks to smoke.

Paul Pezzella and his tobacco cartel do not care what happens to these people. Big tobacco will spend the income of a small nation to tell you their leaf is sacred. The voters can make the tobacco pushers feel the way they ought to feel. Dirty. Greedy. Foolish. Make them ask, "Why did we spend all this money to lose?"

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