

Opinion: Vote yes to raise tobacco taxes

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Despite its reputation as an unwelcoming place for smokers, California ranks 33rd among states in taxing tobacco. Smoking-related diseases cost us hundreds of millions of dollars yearly in health care and lost productivity. Thousands of young people get hooked on nicotine each year.



California can do better. To save lives, it must do better.

Passage of Proposition 29, on the ballot in June, would be a major breakthrough for public health. This initiative would add \$1 to the per-pack tobacco tax in California, currently 87 cents.

There is no dispute that raising the price would result in significant declines in smoking. Health groups backing the tobacco tax hike estimate that it would cause 118,000 adults to quit smoking and prevent 228,000 young Californians from becoming addicts.

Increasing the tax would raise more than \$700 million yearly, and under Proposition 29, nearly all of it would go to cancer research and smoking cessation.

While the revenues would decline over time as smoking rates dropped, the funding would nonetheless help scientists come up with better treatments for cancer patients, and possibly new

ways to detect tumors in their most early stages.

Opponents of Prop. 29 – largely the tobacco industry and groups that receive funding from cigarette companies – are trying to derail the initiative as the work of “a washed-up politician,” former state Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata. It’s true that Perata, a survivor of prostate cancer, helped launched the initiative and has raised money for it. But Prop. 29 is supported by the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association and other reputable groups and individuals that can’t be smeared by the “taint” of serving in public office.

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