

Study: Most tobacco money California collects doesn't go to prevent or stop smoking

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

With California voters poised to vote next week on a tobacco tax hike, a new federal study concludes that the state has used relatively little of the billions of dollars in tobacco money it already takes in to prevent kids from smoking or to help smokers quit.

Between 1998 and 2010, just 6 percent of the money collected from a massive lawsuit settlement and from cigarette taxes went to tobacco interdiction and education programs, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported last week, far below federal spending guidelines for effectively curbing tobacco use.

The report has provided fuel for both sides of the pitched debate over a June 5 ballot measure that would more than double the state tax on a pack of cigarettes. The money would pay for tobacco-related disease research and anti-smoking programs and go to fight illicit tobacco sales.

Proponents such as American Cancer Society lobbyist Jim Knox say the CDC report underscores why voters should support Proposition 29 – to lock in money for anti-tobacco efforts, improve public health and ultimately save lives.

The measure would bolster proven anti-tobacco programs that are woefully underfunded but remain a “model throughout the nation and the world,” Knox said.

Beth Miller, a spokeswoman for the tobacco industry-backed No on Prop 29 campaign, said the CDC study just proves government

can't be trusted with more tobacco tax money. She compared the ballot measure to others that funded controversial state projects, such as high-speed rail and stem cell research.

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