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Nevada Legislature Passes Historic Budget Bill

The Nevada Legislature today passed Senate Bill 483, which will provide approximately \$1.1 billion in additional funding over the next biennium. The bill awaits Governor Brian Sandoval's signature.

Included in the bill is a provision that increases the cigarette tax by \$1, from 80 cents per pack to \$1.80 per pack. This is the first cigarette tax increase since 2003. The increase is expected to generate approximately \$96 million per year, according to the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Fiscal Analysis Division.

"The Nevada Tobacco Prevention Coalition appreciates the commitment to adequately fund education and other health care programs," said NTPC policy director Michael Hackett. "This commitment allows us, as a coalition, to more effectively carry out our mission to reduce tobacco use, and we're proud to have been a part of this historic legislation."

Higher taxes are a proven method to reduce cigarette use, according to Tom McCoy, NTPC president, adding that improving public health benefits the state economically.

"The more people who quit smoking and are discouraged from ever starting because of higher taxes helps Nevada save money," McCoy stated. McCoy also noted that the positive impact on public health should sustain itself for generations to come "because fewer young people will take up smoking."

The overall cost in Nevada to treat diseases caused by smoking and other tobacco use is approximately \$1.1 billion annually. Medicaid alone spends almost \$150 million each year to treat tobacco-related disease and illness. Ultimately, these costs are borne by Nevada taxpayers, citizens and businesses.

"We are excited that Nevada wants to be a leader in public health," Frankie Vigil, executive director of the American Lung Association in Nevada, said, echoing McCoy's statements.

"We know that not only will the higher tax raise much needed state revenue, but will also deter use and help prevent potential new smokers from starting a highly addictive habit."

Ben Schmaus, Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association in Nevada, concurred.

"This increase will be a strong incentive for current smokers to have their last cigarette and

a convincing deterrent for individuals, especially youth, who are considering their very first cigarette,” he said, noting that the additional funds will help address critical needs.

As of January 1, 2015, 34 states had cigarette tax rates higher than Nevada. The national average as of that date is \$1.54 per pack.

Raising the cigarette tax by \$1 per pack had strong support across all political parties and population groups, according to a May 2015 survey conducted for the Retail Association of Nevada, including among populations with typically higher-than-average smoking rates. Other polling conducted over the past few years showed support high among smokers and non-smokers alike.

As important as the cigarette tax increase is for NTPC, SB483 is as much about the “big picture” for the state and its role as a community partner.

“The individual members that represent our member organizations all work and live here,” Hackett said. “We want better education for our children, better health care for our families, and a better future for all Nevadans.”

The Nevada Tobacco Prevention Coalition is comprised of public health organizations whose mission is to improve the health of all Nevadans by reducing the burden of tobacco use and nicotine addiction.

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