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## **Cigarette-tax hike is sound**

### ***Those who worry about the effect on poor have misplaced priorities***

As part of a proposal to reform state taxes that he unveiled yesterday, Gov. John Kasich has said he would like to increase the tax on cigarettes. Whatever beneficial effect this would have on state revenues, the real benefit would be in saving lives.

And, if it will disproportionately save the lives of the poorest Ohioans, all the better. This, of course, is the flip side of the argument against the governor's proposal: Some critics say a cigarette-tax hike would disproportionately fall upon the poor, who are twice as likely to smoke.

According to government data, 45 percent of those in households earning less than \$15,000 a year are smokers. Meanwhile, just 20 percent of smokers live in households earning at least \$50,000 a year.

Such objections are shortsighted.

If the state could get Ohioans to quit smoking, the savings — in lives and government expenditures — would be enormous. Overall, just 23.3 percent of Ohioans smoke. But an astounding 42 percent of those on Medicaid smoke, and Ohio spends more than \$1 billion a year to treat their smoking-related ailments.

Raising the cigarette tax would reduce the amount Ohioans spend subsidizing this deadly habit. And, studies show, it would help people quit while preventing many from starting.

The rule of thumb, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, is that for every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes, there is a 3 to 5 percent drop in use. And price increases are more effective in reducing smoking among men, African-Americans, Hispanics and the poor.

In his mid-biennium budget review, released yesterday, Kasich proposed raising the cigarette tax by 60 cents a pack, from \$1.25 to \$1.85. He also seeks to apply the tax to other tobacco products, including the currently untaxed e-cigarettes.

This would boost the state's cigarette-tax revenue, now at \$770 million a year, by an additional \$204 million in fiscal year 2015. Over three years, the additional tax revenue would total \$848 million, the administration estimates.

But there's a more-pressing reason to raise the cigarette tax: Smoking is the No. 1 cause of lung cancer, which kills more Americans than breast, colon and prostate cancer combined.

Read the rest of the editorial [here](#).

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