

The Campaign to Raise Florida's Tobacco Excise Tax



WEEKLY CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Friday, April 3, 2009

The American Cancer Society, Florida Division, is advocating for a \$1 per pack tax increase on cigarettes. By raising the tax, the state can reduce tobacco consumption, reduce the health care costs from tobacco-related diseases, and generate significant funding to invest in our state's health care system. Here's the latest:

The fifth week of session was the best yet for the *PASS THE BUCK* campaign, with legislation to raise Florida's woefully low cigarette tax by a buck seeing its first official movement. **Senate Bill 1840** by **Sen. Ted Deutch (D-Boca Raton)** was adopted by the Senate Finance and Tax Committee Tuesday on a bipartisan, 5-0 vote. Tuesday's passage came on the heels of a major announcement by Senate leadership regarding its intentions on the issue.



Sen. Thad Altman (R-Viera) points to data showing a huge gap between what the state spends on tobacco-related illnesses and what users contribute

Senator Thad Altman (R-Viera), who chairs the Senate Finance and Tax Committee, led a contingent of senators in outlining a plan to add a one dollar "tobacco surcharge" to each pack of cigarettes, while also imposing a levy on all other tobacco products, including cigars, of one dollar per ounce. Based on a review by the state's economists, the restructured package sponsored by Sen. Deutch, now entitled the "Protecting Florida's Health Act," would generate just over \$1 billion annually. In other action stemming from the Deutch bill's restructuring that should expedite the legislation's path to the Senate floor, the number of committee references for SB 1840 was reduced from five to two. The next step for the bill is the

Senate Ways and Means Policy and Steering Committee, where it is expected to be considered on Tuesday, April 7th, just prior to a recess for the religious holidays. The full Senate could take up the measure and send it to the House as early as Friday, April 17th.

The week also marked the effective dates of two recent cigarette tax increases that underscore the huge public health opportunity of this initiative. Wednesday of this week saw the federal cigarette tax officially go up by 61.66-cents per pack. The very same day, the cigarette tax in doubled, from 30-cents to 60-cents, in Kentucky, the state with the nation's highest smoking rate by far. Seizing upon the tobacco control momentum that has been sweeping the country can actually boost for our campaign here in Florida. While some lawmakers are reticent to tack an additional levy on Florida's smokers right on top of the federal action, there's growing recognition that even more lives can be saved by Florida moving on this issue sooner rather than later. There is also acknowledgement that our state cigarette tax now ranks lower than yet another key tobacco state (hardly a point of pride), while our Medicaid expenses from tobacco-related illnesses are contributing to a mounting budget deficit.



*Sen. Ted Deutch
(D-Boca Raton)*

A news story that encapsulates where our issue stands at the mid-point of session can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CN4f75X2aE>. Kudos to the more than 400 ACS volunteers who rallied on the steps of the Capitol back in February, as shown in this video. Our Advocacy Day in Tallahassee continues to have a significant impact.

As always, you can visit www.acscan.org/florida, sponsored by our partner, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, for up-to-date information on our *PASS THE BUCK* campaign. Thank you for your untiring advocacy on behalf of the fight against cancer!