

OPINIONS

HEAD TO HEAD: PROPOSITION B

Proposition would unfairly burden poor



Robert Overmann

You have the opportunity, provided you're a registered Missouri voter, to block a tax this Tuesday that would reinforce the cycle of poverty and unfairly burden those in greatest financial need. Missouri's Proposition B, billed as a public health measure and an opportunity to bolster education funding, is nothing more than a shameful money-grab targeting the smoking minority.

Proposition B would increase Missouri's cigarette tax greater than five times. The funding supposedly would go toward Missouri education and smoking cessation programs, according to an Oct. 8 Kansas City Star article. At first, this sounds like a win-win situation — education would benefit, while smoking rates theoretically would decrease.

The reality, however, is that this tax would generate additional funds at the expense of Missouri's poorest. Thirty four percent of adult Americans earning \$6,000 to \$11,999 per year smoke, compared to only 13 percent of Americans who earn at least \$90,000 per year, according to a March 2008 Gallup study. The predicted \$283 million to \$423 million per year generated by this proposition, according to the Kansas City Star article, would be paid by Missouri's poorest. Those who struggle most to make ends meet, who are faced with tough decisions between paying the month's rent or the electric bill, would be the tax base for this quintupled tobacco tax.

Those who argue Missourians who don't want to pay the tax should just quit smoking are forgetting a simple fact that any regular smoker can attest to — smoking is highly addictive. Nicotine's addictive capabilities are similar to those of heroin, according to a University of Minnesota study. Of those who smoke, about 70 percent want to quit, according to a Nov. 2011 USA Today study. For many elderly smokers who began smoking before the true risks of tobacco use were known and have smoked for decades, smoking cessation is virtually impossible. Of those who smoke, only 6 percent were able to quit successfully last year, according to the same USA Today study. Legislators prey on the fact tobacco taxes always will have a tax base — most smokers simply cannot stop, and thus have no choice in whether they pay these unfairly burdening taxes.

Although the funds generated from this proposed tax will be dedicated to education and smoking cessation programs, will Missouri education and Missourians actually benefit? The Missouri budget is fluid — though funds raised from this tax would be devoted to education, there's nothing stopping Missouri legislators from using the generated revenue as an excuse to re-appropriate other sources of education funding. Historically, it's quite common for

legislators to justify cuts of equal or greater magnitude in state appropriations when these new revenue streams become available, according to the Kansas City Star article.

This proposition also would make higher education less accessible for the smoking demographic of Missourians. College is an expensive endeavor and, for many, especially those with low incomes, requires significant saving and financial planning. For these Missourians, the choice increasingly will come down to the immediate satisfaction of purchasing a pack of cigarettes or the long-term gratification of being able to pay for a college education. In New York, a state with relatively high taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products, low income individuals spent 25 percent of their income on their tobacco habit, according to a Sept. 19 New York Times article. If Missouri continues to raise their tobacco taxes, the prospects of many low-income Missourians to ever attain a college education go up in smoke.

I strongly support an increase in funding to education, but burdening Missouri's poorest with supplying that funding morally is wrong. This tax measure would disproportionately burden those already struggling to survive, while denying them the opportunity to further their education. Billing Proposition B as a health measure is simply misleading — Most smokers are unable to quit and have no realistic choice in whether they pay the tax. There's also no guarantee educational institutions actually will see an increase in funding. A vote against Proposition B is a vote for responsible taxation in Missouri.

Robert Overmann is a junior English major from Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Proposition would benefit education



Adam Rollins

Missouri Proposition B will benefit our state. This proposition, which easily has drawn the loudest opposition of any local issue, advocates a record increase of taxes for the sale of tobacco products. This extra revenue, as stated on the ballot, would be directed solely toward funding Missouri schools and educational programs about the health risks of smoking.

Smoking is a bad habit. It poses health risks for smokers and everyone. In fact, I think one of the main reasons our government continues to tolerate smoking is because we can tax it as a reliable source of state revenue. High taxes probably prevent a more drastic ban on the sale of tobacco products.

This tax has tangible benefits for the Missouri population. First of all, it provides much needed funding for state education. This tax will generate more than \$223 million in new funding for education, according to an Oct. 21 St. Louis Post-Dispatch article. I, as well as many other public school students, have felt the

effects of the state struggle to support its school systems. Although this revenue only will be a small help to individual schools once it is distributed, minor relief is still relief.

Second, the tobacco education programs funded by this tax increase, as well as the tax increase itself, will further deter young people from picking up this bad habit. It will provide extra incentive for older smokers to quit. Some might say this tax unfairly targets the minority group of smokers, but those who benefit from the motivation to quit smoking will save money in the long run. Health care costs for smoking-related illnesses almost certainly are a greater burden for individuals than this tax.

This brings me to my third point — that illnesses related to tobacco products are an unnecessary burden to the Missouri health care system. Missouri spends \$2.13 billion per year for health care costs directly related to smoking, according to an Oct. 21 St. Louis Post-Dispatch article. A strong deterrent to potential new smokers will save our state and its citizens millions or even billions more than it takes away.

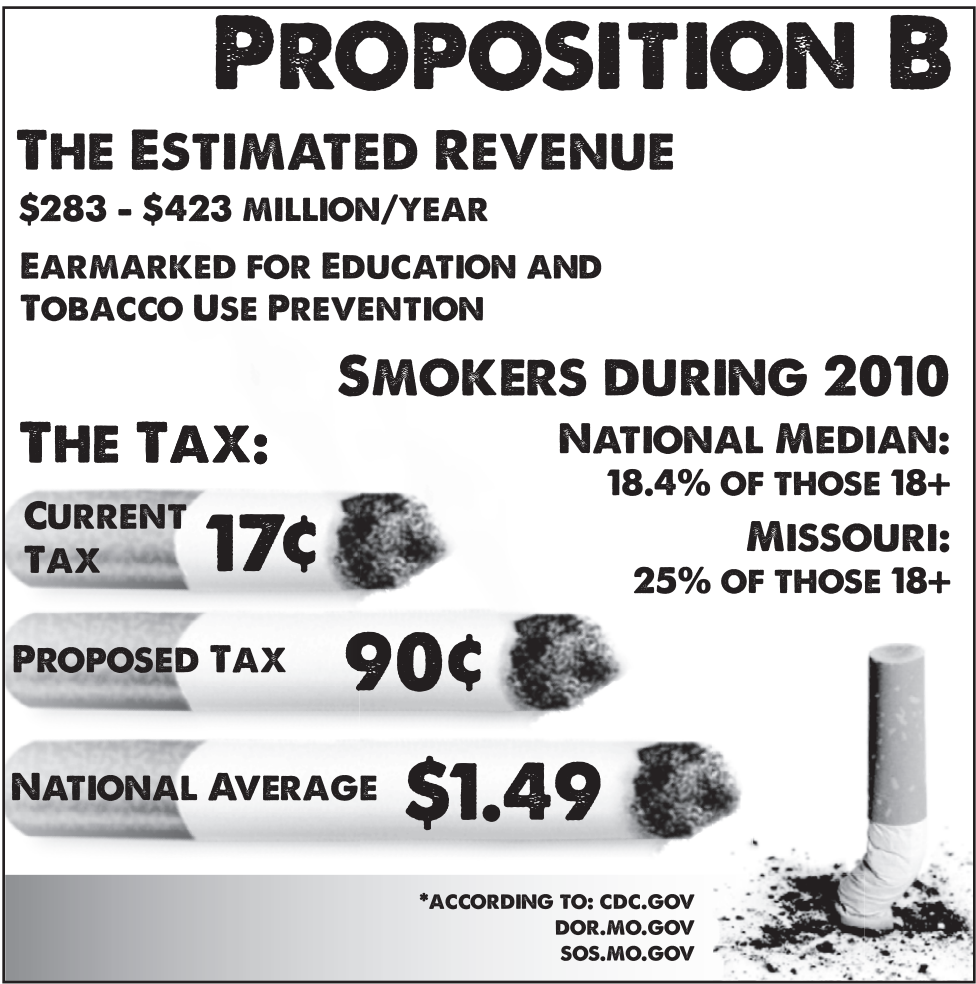
Some arguments against this tax increase are that it hurts Missouri businesses, is unfair and sets a precedent for poor public policy.

One of the major standpoints of opponents of this proposition is that this record tax increase will hurt our competitiveness with businesses in neighboring states. However, the only reason this tax increase seems so drastic is that Missouri's current tax rate of 17 cents per pack is one of the lowest in the country. Even after the tax increase, we will still be lower than the national tax rate of \$1.49 per pack, according to an Oct. 21 St. Louis Post-Dispatch article. I also think that threats of reduction of cross-state business cascading into drastic job loss and reduction of state revenue are exaggerated, perhaps grossly so.

I already have mentioned the complaint that this tax unfairly targets a minority of citizens to benefit the majority. A distinction I would like to make here is that this tax would not target any person. It targets products. This doesn't seem like an important distinction, but I think it is. Few complain that luxury taxes unfairly target the minority of wealthy citizens. There is nothing forcing citizens to smoke except their own addiction. They have tobacco companies to blame for that, not the state of Missouri.

The third major argument of opponents to Prop. B is that it will set the stage for taxes on other publicly disapproved products like soda, alcohol and fast food. This snowball effect, slippery slope argument is one that is used often throughout politics and rarely proves true. It assumes that voters have no sense of where we are and where we are going as a society. It also assumes that voters actually would not support these initiatives throughout the future.

Adam Rollins is a sophomore communication major from St. Charles, Mo.



AROUND THE QUAD: What changes should be made to future presidential debates?



"Give each candidate two minutes each. No interrupting, and that's all they get."

Cary Nave
Senior



"The moderator has to be a lot more stern. I lost a lot of interest when the candidates kept interrupting."

Rachel Tucker
Sophomore



"There's really nothing that can change. We the people don't really have a say."

Emma Burton
Freshman



"I think they need to have more restrictions on going off topic. Most of what they say doesn't make sense."

Tiffany Brock
Freshman

Letter to the Editor

Response to "Online learning curtails knowledge" column

I am writing in response to Jennifer Marks' article, "Online learning curtails knowledge" in the October 4th Index.

As the Chair of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, the decision to change the format of the pre-calculus classes (College Algebra, Trigonometry, and Precalculus) was ultimately my responsibility, and I believe our current system enhances rather than curtails learning.

This belief is supported by preliminary data from the classes including student success rates and a vast reduction in the number of

student complaints about the courses. Characterizing our classes as online is misleading. These self-paced pre-calculus classes are delivered using Computer-Assisted Instruction with the Hawkes Learning System. Students use the Hawkes system to learn the needed skills by looking at worked examples, watching explanatory videos, and doing problems for which the computer provides feedback. Companion textbooks are also available.

When the students feel ready, they test their knowledge and are certified by correctly completing problems. When they have certified a number of skills, the students report to the testing room where they must demonstrate their knowledge on a computerized

test with at least 70% accuracy. Students who are unable to demonstrate the required level of competence or who want to improve their scores are allowed to retest with only the highest score counting toward their grades, which are based solely on their averages for the two or three tests.

When we first began offering these classes in this format, we also began offering free tutoring all day, five days per week, and continued the free tutoring five evenings each week. Our dedicated tutoring room is primarily staffed by upper-level students, many planning to be mathematics teachers, who understand the content and have been trained as tutors. Free one-on-one tutoring is also available through the Student Success Center.

For the last two years, we have offered optional lectures for these courses with live instructors who also pace students through the courses. The times for these lectures are available in TruView when students enroll and are publicized throughout each semester. Like the tutoring, students are free to attend as many or as few of the lectures as they need to be successful in their courses. The professor for these courses also offers extensive office hours to help students for whom the other avenues have not been beneficial.

Each semester we have improved these courses based on experience and student feedback. We recognize this system requires students to take more responsibility for their own

learning, but we believe Truman students are fully capable of that level of maturity. This system provides a greater variety of opportunities for learning than a traditional classroom, and far more help is now available for struggling students.

Our system is not perfect, nor is it ideal for every student, but it is grounded in the latest research about how students learn, was carefully considered before implementation, and works well for a majority of students. We continue to welcome constructive feedback to further enhance student learning.

Susan LaGrassa
Math and computer science department chair