

Governors' State of The State Address -SMOKING

When we're talking about health, there's one more thing we need to confront: tobacco.

I've devoted much of my public career to this fight. As Attorney General, I helped lead the national effort to take on Big Tobacco and beat them in court for the first time in forty years. We made them take down the billboards, get rid of the vending machines, and send Joe Camel into retirement.

As a result, teen smoking is down 40 percent since 2000 and sales to minors are now at their lowest level in Wisconsin history.

Despite this progress, too many of our kids are still lighting up. Too many lives are being cut short, and the cost has swelled into the billions.

In fact, Wisconsin taxpayers are forced to pay \$500 million every year in Medicaid costs directly related to smoking.

And so, after consulting with public health leaders from around the state, I am proposing to raise Wisconsin's tobacco tax by \$1.25 a pack ... and set the money aside to pay the cost of tobacco-related illnesses.

Not only will it help fund our health care needs, it will save lives. Health groups like the American Cancer Society say that every day, 5,000 kids try their first cigarette and another 2,000 kids become regular smokers. One third of these kids will eventually die from their addiction. These health groups say that in every state where the tobacco tax has been increased, kids end up smoking less.

We all have family and friends who smoke – good people of good character – who want to quit and fight this addiction every day. And I want you to know that this increase will be coupled with a major new initiative to help you quit smoking and live healthier. We'll commit \$30 million to help people who are smoking ... stop smoking – because you are an important part of Wisconsin's future.

Finally, we must protect our families from the health hazards of secondhand smoke.

Because everyone has the right to breathe clean air at work and in public places, tonight, I am calling for legislation to make all public buildings and workplaces completely smoke-free.

Let's pass this bill to protect our families and most importantly ... save children's lives.