

Konrad Jackson

From: Mike Coons <mcoons@mtaonline.net>
Sent: Sunday, February 21, 2016 9:45 AM
To: Rep. Kurt Olson
Cc: Rep. Shelley Hughes
Subject: Oppose HB 304

Rep Olson, please add this to packet on HB 304.

Mike

My name is Mike Coons from Palmer and I am speaking out against HB 304 and SB 133!

The stated reasons by Governor Walker for all the taxes he is proposing is that we can't cut our way to a sustainable budget. His piddling 100 million dollars in cuts does little to nothing in getting the budget to a sustainable level. The Governor instead wants to tax anything that makes money and which now goes into our pockets.

I listened to testimony in the Senate Labor and Commerce on SB 133, companion to HB 304. The same old, same old was there. Sadly, the most discriminated people in Alaska and the nation are smokers, hands down. So, I'm going to take my opposition on a different note than what has been and will be said in committee hearings.

I'm an addict, I am addicted to nicotine and although I have not had a cigarette or any tobacco product in 16 years, I know if I were to have one, I'd most likely be at it again! Being a former smoker, 30 years, 1 ½ packs per day, I am very aware of when I'm around a smoker. The smell is obvious. The facial appearances of smokers are different than non-smokers. Yet, I stand with them against being so discriminated, vilified, attacked repeatedly, taxed into oblivion! The radio and TV ads that supposedly are there to get smokers to quit are so negative in methods that they have the opposite impact, I know, more negative, more I refused to quit!

Now, the "help" that is out there. So we have been told the sin tax goes to helping people quit. Here are the facts. The smoking cessation class that I went to, and from all I hear, still the same, had everything to do with treating the smoker, not as an addict, but as primal ooze that hasn't dried yet! The persons running the class' are not smokers, not ex-smokers or if they are ex-smokers they are the radicals! The methods to quit are arcane, inane, outlandish and vial! One of the "tricks" is to put buds in a jar until you stop smoking and then each time you feel the urge, open the bottle and take a big smell! Really? Not once did we get a positive means, not once was any 12 step method used to help us! By the way, I walked out of the "class" and 15 people followed me when I went after the "instructor" and her attack/negative attitude to us!

Another fact. When we (my wife and I) did decide to quit. We went to the VA to get prescribed the Nicotine patch. Back then the cost of the patch at the Commissary was more than the two cartons, each we smoked in a month! So, since we had the ability, we went to get the prescription at no cost (I feel sorry for those who pay today!). My wife and I knew what we wanted, what we were going to do and had come to that point of wanting to quit for real. Yet, to get the prescription, we were told we had to take a smoking cessation class, three times a week, in Anchorage, during the day! We lived in Palmer, would have to drive to Anchorage three times a week, and I would have to take time off from work at loss of pay (worked in Eagle River then)! No, classes in the Palmer area, none in the evening. On top of this, was our experiences with past smoking cessation class', no way were we going to lose money, spend valuable gas money, all to be treated like we had before and most likely not quit! The only

way we got the prescriptions was because we almost stood on the desk of the “doctor”! We told him in no uncertain terms that we knew what we were doing, that we had been to cessation classes before and we were NOT going to do that again! It took a strong stance and almost got us thrown out of the VA, but we got the prescriptions! It took us better part of 6 months to be nicotine free. It was hard, but we stuck together and did it! No thanks to those who “think” they know better!

Another fact that needs to be clearly stated. Cigarettes are around \$10 a pack! The middle class and “poor” are the primary smokers. I can't imagine spending that today! My ability to be debt free would have taken years longer to obtain if we still smoked! So, whom are you hurting with the outrageous sin tax we have today, not to mention the increase as proposed?

Then of course, the lie about the money going to help! Ads that are negative, cost a bundle. Classes that are negative with poor outcomes and that are not designed in time and place so if a person did want to attend they could without loss of job time, travel, etc.! The money goes to the General Fund, period! If all smokers were to quit, the loss of income to the State would be huge! This sin tax has never, not once, been about helping smokers quit, it has had been everything to do to attack a small minority through outright discrimination!

Now, as to e-cigs. I know people who “vape”. I worked with a guy that was trying to quit smoking and was off cigarettes. Now for some reality on this.

The contents are far less harmful (note I said less, not “safe”) than the contents of cigarette smoke! The user can be deliberate in what the vape fluid he/she buys. May have nicotine, may have different percentages or may not have nicotine. The Nicorette patch has a percentage of Nicotine and we stepped down to then no nicotine. Same holds with this. That is up to the buyer/user as to what they want. The vapor exhaled is mostly water and I worked at a small gate with him. I never smelled it once! I never “inhaled it” as “second hand”. Those I worked with who had to step out to smoke reeked with the smell when they came back in!

Lot of quitting smoking has to do with “hand to mouth habit” That is hard to break, many of us, myself included ate more, then we had to fight that effect later! So, the hand to mouth of the e-cigs, in my opinion, makes it harder to give up the “habit”, even when there is no nicotine being ingested.

Yet, the so called “socially tolerant” (read LIBERALS) key in on those “bad people”! It is sad, but a fact that those who preach “tolerance” are the most intolerant of others actions, views, and beliefs!

I ask that these bills die in committee! That you, our legislators, non-smokers, ex-smokers, smokers, vapers, chew, cigar, pipe, all take a solid look at the discrimination this sin tax causes, the damage financially it causes to your constituents and the out right lies and intolerance of those who continually attack there fellow Alaskans!

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