



Statewide Campaign Asks Legislators Who They Really Support: Big Tobacco or Oklahoma?

Cigarette Companies Rake in Profits from Political Gridlock and Partisan Bickering

OKLAHOMA CITY—Frustrated by political gridlock at the State Capitol, the Oklahoma Hospital Association (OHA) is taking to television and social media channels to make the case for a \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax increase. Yesterday, a new ad – [“What’s it going to take?”](#) – began running on television stations statewide.

The campaign asks: “What’s it going to take to keep 2100 Oklahoma kids from becoming addicted to cigarettes this year, to get our legislators to stop playing politics, and to keep Big Tobacco from profiting off this inaction?”

It ends with a call to action for voters to contact their lawmakers and hold them accountable: “Let’s ask legislators who they really support: Oklahoma or Big Tobacco. Quit holding the cigarette tax hostage. Call your legislator and tell them to do the right thing: pass the cigarette tax.”

OHA President Craig Jones said the advertising campaign was a call-to-action meant to highlight the moral importance of passing a cigarette tax.

“The fact of the matter is the cigarette tax is a no-brainer,” said Jones. “We know it will save lives and keep kids from smoking. We know it will reduce health care costs in Oklahoma. It will also provide more than \$215 million in annual revenue to fund health care at a time when we are on the verge of mass closures of mental health facilities, nursing homes and rural hospitals. Our state is facing a health care crisis and a moral crisis, and the cigarette tax is the obvious solution.

“This campaign calls attention to the fact that the only winner of the current stalemate and inaction is Big Tobacco,” continued Jones. “If you are an Oklahoman who needs medical care or who has a family member in a nursing home, you are losing. If you have loved ones with mental health or addiction

issues, you are losing. If you're a teenager who just picked up a pack of cigarettes for the first time, you are losing. If you're an executive at Big Tobacco though, you are this year's Big Winner. That's not right, and we are asking the public to join us in asking our lawmakers to do the right thing and fix this."

In the 2017 legislative session, a \$1.50 per pack cigarette fee was passed to support smoking cessation and fund Oklahoma's health care and mental health agencies. When that fee was struck down as unconstitutional, those agencies were left with a budget shortfall of over \$200 million. As a result of that funding loss, agencies are now preparing to close mental health facilities, slash the state's Medicaid program, close nursing homes and reduce services to the developmentally disabled, vulnerable children and elderly Oklahomans.

OHA and other health care providers continue to ask legislators to pass a constitutional \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax with the required three-quarters legislative majority. If the Legislature does not act, agencies will begin dramatic cuts beginning Dec. 1.

Smoking is the number one cause of preventable death and disability in the U.S., killing approximately 1,300 Americans a day. Studies show that in Oklahoma, a \$1.50 per pack increase on cigarettes would:

- Prevent 16,700 lives lost due to premature smoking-related deaths.
- Motivate 30,400 adult smokers who will quit within the first year of implementation.
- Save the state \$1.22 billion in long-term health care costs.

