

**Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
Monday, February 23, 2009**

**SUPPORT SB 930 – An Act Concerning the Cigarette Tax, Tobacco Products Tax
and the Alcoholic Beverage Tax**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman, and thank you for this opportunity to address you. My name is Christopher Sheehan, from Middlebury, Connecticut. I appeared before the Assembly in a similar capacity several years ago. It was to support legislation that would “clear the air” in public accommodations by banning smoking. It seems quite odd now, but at the time, it was controversial and took years to pass. I say “in a similar capacity” because my first concern then, as today, was Connecticut’s health and well-being, especially as it relates to tobacco use.

I am here to offer full support for raising the tax on cigarettes by \$1.00 per pack, with some portion of that revenue dedicated to Medicaid coverage of smoking cessation services.

There isn’t anyone in this room, I think, who would argue that less smoking would not improve the health of our state -- with a resulting improvement in the state’s financial position. Please consider this: each 10 percent increase in the price of a pack of cigarettes reduces smoking rates among young people by 5.5 percent and adults by two percent. That’s an overall decrease of four percent. With tobacco use costing the state an estimated \$1.6 billion this year alone, the impact would be immediate and enormous on both Connecticut’s physical and fiscal health.

The increased tax revenue would be in excess of \$50 million a year. With the state in a constant tug-of-war between the need for increasing taxes and spending less for services, this seems a responsible way to accomplish both objectives. The argument is made, I know, that as people give up smoking, the projected revenue stream will shrink. As fewer Connecticut citizens use tobacco, the state will take in smaller and smaller amounts by this tax. That would be like praying I get into plenty of accidents so that I can take the best advantage of my car insurance. I hope this income source shrinks to zero and that our children and grandchildren decide that smoking is too expensive a habit to take up or maintain.

Smoking is the nation’s leading preventable cause of illness and premature death. As things stand now, we can expect to spend billions on Connecticut’s health care over the next few years responding to this epidemic. This tax hike will demonstrably result in lowered costs for health care and greatly increased productiveness. Not to mention the incalculable sorrow that results.

I have been a volunteer with the American Cancer Society for more than 20 years. I share the Society's ambition to make smoking history. It makes sense from every point of view, and it seems clear that SB 930 will help advance this agenda. But as always, the stakes are personal as well. Many years ago, my mother was in a Connecticut hospital, dying of cancer. Although it was unrelated to any tobacco use, I vividly remember my reaction when I came upon a woman her age smoking up a storm at the hospital's entrance. I had all I could do not to confront her and say, "Don't you know what you are doing to yourself and your children!" Well, we know what smoking does to us and to our children. In that spirit, I hope you will act positively on this bill. It will be a breath of fresh air for all of us.

Thank you.

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