

OUR VIEW**One smart
tax increase**

The budget passed by the Joint Finance Committee retained the \$1.25 per pack increase in tax on a pack of cigarettes proposed by Gov. Jim Doyle. Republican leadership in the state legislature has said they won't pass a budget with a tax increase, but this is one increase that should be embraced.

The increase would bring Wisconsin taxes to \$2.02 per pack on cigarette — a daunting sum. And that's the point. Studies have

**Increase
in cigarette
tax could
mean fewer
smokers in
the future**

shown price is an influence on how much smokers already hooked smoke, and more importantly, it's a deterrent for young smokers; how much better that they decide they'd rather spend their money on

something else and never start. According to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, the cigarette tax increase could result in 42,000 adults in Wisconsin dropping the habit, and even more significantly, the state could expect 20 percent fewer young people to start in the first place. The U.S. Institute of Medicine estimates there are 440,000 deaths each year in the United States related directly to tobacco use, and we spend \$89 billion each year in smoking-related health costs.

The proposed tax increase would be funneled directly to fund smoking cessation and anti-tobacco efforts and the rest used to offset smoking-relating expenses taxpayers are funding through Medicaid.

A tax increase? Yes. Hopefully one that will put itself out business by acting as a deterrent.