

OUR VIEW

A tax increase to save lives

The Senate and Assembly versions of the budget should both soon be known as the Assembly could vote on its version of the state budget as early as today. Then it's up to negotiators from both chambers to come up with a compromise.

While funding anything with a tax increase is sure to be unpopular with the Assembly majority, the tax increase that makes sense is an increase on cigarette taxes, an increase that will be used to fund anti-tobacco efforts and offset

the state's health care costs incurred by tobacco use.

According to the American Cancer Society, the \$1.25 per pack increase on cigarettes will likely encourage as many as 40,000 adults to quit and keep 84,000 children from smoking. Those numbers come from studies that measure the impact price increases elsewhere have had on smokers' habits — and more importantly on keeping young people from beginning to smoke in the first place.

An increase in the price of cigarettes is only one piece of a puzzle that should include federal action such as allowing the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco as a drug.

But Wisconsin can make a statement here that it values the lives of its citizens. This is a tax increase that should remain in the budget.