

care system. Now, smoking, I know it's an option, it's a legal option that people have as adults to do. But its impact is felt society wide and by the taxpayers of both the state and the nation. Whenever we have a situation where the kind of cost impacts are there by individuals choosing to do something like smoke, we have to, I think, have some of the burden go back on those individuals for having made that choice. I remember a few years ago that the Director of Health said that they estimated the cost, medical cost of each pack of cigarettes was something like \$2 a pack, something over \$2 a pack. And I've always remembered that, because our cigarette tax is about 27 cents a pack. So if we truly wanted to have a user fee on smoking cigarettes, you'd have \$2 a pack for everybody who smokes for taxes that would then go into the health care system to help cover the costs of providing the medical care for those individuals who smoke, that is increased by that amount. As I said, it's estimated between 336 and \$600 a year, per smoker, increased costs, economic costs in terms of health care impacts. So, the more we can increase the cigarette tax, the more we cover the expenses of cigarette smoking, and also discourage cigarette smoking. What we've seen is, since I've been in the Legislature now 15 years, we've gone from something of almost \$2 million where each sum of the cigarette tax is now down to about 1.3 million, I believe. So, clearly, we've had cigarette smoking go down by about a third in the 15 years I've been down here. And I think it's on a decline even further. So we will see this revenue base go away. But I think it's in all our best interest to...to recognize that there is an economic impact to smoking and try to cover some of the costs involved. Now one of the things that I've...I've been concerned about on the cigarette tax is, out of the 27 cents on the cigarette tax the state now gets, there's only 1 cent going to anything that could be thought of as health care. One cent now goes into cancer research, I believe. There's a proposal to have another 2 cents go into cancer research. But we have none of the money going into public health programs, or to health services that will help some of the cost of smoking. And so there will be legislation that will be considered next week that will provide for funding for public health services in this state, for planning for health purposes in this state, and we'll consider that bill at that time. But we will be asking for a 1 cent cigarette tax increase to cover that. So, I will support this 5-cent increase without any designation. But I do hope that in time we will recognize that cigarette smoking has a direct link into health care, and that some cigarette tax money ought to go