



KANSAS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR

For immediate release:
June 3, 2008

Nicole Corcoran, Press Secretary
785.368.8500

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

Tobacco is costing Kansas

Tobacco use is the most preventable cause of death and disease in Kansas. One thing all Kansans can agree on is that an effort to stop young Kansans from ever smoking is a worthwhile goal.

Each year nearly 3,900 Kansans die from tobacco-related diseases, including 290 deaths attributed to secondhand smoke. The most startling statistic is that one in four Kansas high school students currently uses some form of tobacco. That's right – one in four young people are using a product that can cause cancer, heart disease, diabetes and emphysema. If this troubling trend continues, 54,000 Kansas youth are projected to die from smoking - that's equivalent to the population of Saline County.

As if the serious health problems associated with tobacco weren't bad enough, there is also a substantial economic impact. Kansans spend almost \$927 million each year in medical expenses related to tobacco. Our state spends an estimated \$196 million on tobacco related Medicaid expenses. Kansas businesses lose an estimated \$863 million each year in lost productivity from workers due to tobacco related illness.

Surely there is something we can do.

This past year, the Kansas Health Policy Authority proposed a comprehensive solution – pass a statewide smoking ban and raise the cost of cigarettes to expand health care services for Kansas children and low income workers.

It is a win/win/win solution. Studies have repeatedly shown that raising the price of cigarettes decreases tobacco use among teens. Since young smokers are very price-sensitive, by raising the price we can prevent young people from ever becoming smokers. The new source of revenue it creates can be used to open the doors of health care to more children and to working Kansans.

A statewide smoking ban in public places also reduces the likelihood that secondhand smoke will affect non-smokers and their families.

I was pleased to have both Republican and Democratic legislative support. But, unfortunately, too few of their colleagues got on board.

I hope that next year the Legislature follows this common sense approach to preventing teen smoking and providing more health care to kids.

Editors' Note: For more information on tobacco use in Kansas, please view the Tobacco Use in Kansas 2007 Status Report at <http://www.kdheks.gov/tobacco/download/TobaccoReport.pdf>

###