

Cigarette Tax Voter Telephone Survey | Summary & Observations

Voters are pessimistic about the direction of the state, especially Republicans, and are divided about what approach to take to balance the state budget.

- Just over one-half (54%) of the electorate think things in the state are off on the wrong track, with strong differences in opinions by political party. Republicans (76% wrong track) have drastically different views about the state's direction than Democrats (38% wrong track), while Independents' views (55% wrong track) fall in between the two groups.
- Differences in opinions between political parties extend into how the state should conceptually deal with its budget deficit. While 56% of voters think it is best to have at least some tax increases to help fund state programs and reduce the deficient, 39% believe that sufficient cuts should be made with no additional tax increases. Republicans are most likely to feel this way (62% compared to 22% of Democrats and 39% of Independents).

Despite hesitation towards new tax increases, over 70% of voters support an increase to the state cigarette tax, both when it was asked about it in general terms and when the concept was posed as a \$1.00 per pack tax increase in the state cigarette tax.

- Although Democrats, Republicans, and Independents disagree on many issues in the state, an increase to the state cigarette tax is *not* one of them. In fact, the tax increase is supported by majorities across political party, age, area of state, and vote history.
- When posed generally without a dollar amount, 71% of voters said they favor increasing the state tax on a pack of cigarettes, with 47% who "strongly" favor it. Five in ten or more of *all subgroups* said they favor this tax increase (even Republicans and voters who said they do not want to see any more tax increases in the state).
- A similar amount (68%) of voters favor a **\$1.00 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax** (46% strongly), including 55% of voters who said there should be no new tax increases in the state. Support for this version of the tax question increased to 72% after voters were read supporting and opposing arguments for the increase (there were equal numbers of arguments read in support and in opposition to the tax).
- Voters have the strongest support for the \$1.00 per pack cigarette tax increase when they are told that the additional revenue would go towards **funding health services and programs that keep children and teens from smoking and helping current smokers to quit**. In this rendition, 71% support the increase (51% strongly). Support rose to 75% after voters were read reasons to support and oppose the tax increase.
- Most voters (83%) said that if their legislator voted to implement the tax increase, it either would not change how they voted in future elections, or it would make them more likely to vote for that legislator.

Even though approximately three-quarters of the electorate think that at least some cuts need to be made to programs to help balance the budget, **78% of voters or more oppose reductions being made in health care services to low-income families, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups.**

- Large majorities of voters oppose reducing funding to in-home care services for seniors and the disabled, health care services for low-income families, and mental health services. Further, at least 50% of voters who said there should be cuts and no new taxes to balance the state budget *oppose* each reduction in health services tested in the survey.
- Voters are especially opposed to reducing care for seniors and the disabled (85% oppose; 57% strongly) and reducing health services for low-income families (78% oppose; 52% strongly).

MEASURE: HB 2110

EXHIBIT: 40

HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE

DATE: 3/24/01 PAGES: 2

SUBMITTED BY: REBECCA RALL

While the additional revenue from increases to the state cigarette tax have been pushed into the general fund in other states that have enacted an increase, the Oregon electorate clearly believes that if the \$1.00 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax is implemented, revenue should go towards health care services, treating tobacco-related illnesses, and programs that reduce tobacco use.

- More than six in ten (64%) voters said the *best* reason to implement the \$1.00 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax is that by raising the price of cigarettes there will be a decrease in the number of smokers in Oregon and millions of dollars will be saved in health care costs. Only 25% said that the best reason to implement the tax increase is that the state needs to find new ways to fund state services like education, public safety, and health care, and an effective way to do this is to increase taxes on products like cigarettes.
- Large majorities of voters support the revenue from the tax increase going towards each health program or service tested, especially **funding tobacco prevention programs** (including among children and teens), **funding health care services for low income Oregonians**, and **funding public health programs in counties across the state**. More than seven in ten voters supported the revenue being used for these programs.
- While those opposed to tobacco tax increases often cite their regressive nature, this argument does not take much stock with Oregon voters. Seven in ten (70%) of the electorate agree that while low-income families are more likely to be affected by this tax increase, they are also more likely to use state funded health services and therefore this tax is not unfair because it will help fund services that they as tobacco users may use one day.

The strongest reasons to support the \$1.00 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax are those that speak to protecting children and teens, as well as arguments about the cost savings to the health care system. All arguments, however, are seen as very good or good by strong majorities of voters.

- Voters think the best arguments in support of the tax increase are:
 - Groups like the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and American Lung Association support the higher tax because it helps prevent children and teens from starting to smoke. The tobacco companies oppose this tax for the same reason; they know that ninety percent of smokers start as teens (78% “very good or good”; 46% very good)
 - Studies show that price increases in the cost of a pack of cigarettes results in a decrease in smoking rates among children and teens (79% “very good or good”; 43% very good)
 - Health care costs caused by smoking total more than one billion dollars per year in Oregon. Increasing the cigarette tax will save millions of dollars by lowering smoking rates and reducing the amount of money we all pay to treat those diseases caused by smoking (76% “very good or good”; 43% very good).
- These three arguments even test well with majorities (51%-55%) of those voters who said they do not currently support the tax increase.
- Almost eight in ten (78%) also agree that tobacco use is a major health care problem that financially affects everyone because tobacco related illnesses cost billions in health care each year, Increasing the cigarette tax is a proven way to reduce health care costs related to tobacco use.

Every argument to oppose the tax increases is seen as poor or very poor by voters, with the exception of a philosophical argument that government should be looking for ways to live within its means through cutting spending. However, even voters who believe government should be cutting spending support the cigarette tax increase.

- Almost two-thirds (65%) said the argument that instead of raising taxes to solve budget problems, government should be looking for ways to live within its means through cutting spending is a very good or good reason to oppose the cigarette tax, even among supporters of the tax increase.
- It is worth noting that the reason 88% of voters said they voted against Measure 50 in 2007 – that the cigarette tax does not belong in the Constitution – is currently not a factor in this tax increase.

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MEASURE: HB 2231
 EXHIBIT: 20
 HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE
 DATE: 3/27/2011 PAGES: 2
 SUBMITTED BY: REBECCA BALL

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MEASURE: HB 2385
 EXHIBIT: 2
 HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE
 DATE: 3/21/01 PAGES: 2
 SUBMITTED BY: REBECCA BALL

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MEASURE: HB 2533
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 HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE
 DATE: 3/27/2011 PAGES: 2
 SUBMITTED BY: REBECCA BALL

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