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The first piece of legislation that President Obama signed was a bill extending health insurance to very many previously uninsured children. The President also announced that there would be a specific source of funds to pay for this insurance; a new 62 cents-a-pack tax on cigarettes. That raised a question in my mind that has nagged at me for years.

I would say that by now a majority of Americans don't like cigarettes and don't want to be around people who smoke them. We know there is a range of illnesses linked to cigarettes, starting, most prominently with lung cancer. We have aggressive programs and products aimed at getting smokers to stop and young people not to start. One of these programs has had a nasty little side effect that I have, almost literally, stumbled upon.

The places where people can smoke have been severely curtailed so cafes have become their favorite venue. I regularly walk in my neighborhood and, beginning around 2001, I began to see large numbers of cigarette butts on the roadsides. For some reason smokers do not use auto ashtrays. They throw the butts out the window. I can tell you that along roads in northwest San Antonio you can find 100 cigarette butts, that's five packs, in 100 yards. And they're not biodegradable.

In spite of this campaign against cigarettes, we are looking lovingly to them as a major revenue source. The state of Texas receives \$1.41 per pack sold here and the U.S. will now receive \$1.01 per pack. On top of this revenue stream there is the "tobacco settlement". In the early 2000's this settlement between major tobacco and all 50 states stipulated that in exchange for no more legal actions, the tobacco companies would pay each of the 50 states huge sums, annually in the billions, and effectively in perpetuity. Originally this money would be used for anti-smoking campaigns, but the states got a new idea. They realized that these annual payments could service a large bond issue which would allow an immediate huge cash infusion whose debt service was not the state's obligation. We got "Tobacco Bonds" whose proceeds were used for much more than anti-smoking campaigns.

So here we have an interesting picture; a product whose use we are actively trying to stop and whose sales are being used as a major source of funds to our government. OK, let's expand our minds.

A few days ago I heard news of a seizure of marijuana in New York that had an estimated street value of \$150 million. Let me say right here that I do not use marijuana or any other recreational drug. My parents taught me that was wrong. The seizure in New York had come to the U.S. from Canada; surely by a circuitous route. Now here is a substance that has probably nowhere near the long-term danger of tobacco and that is very popular. I am sure the people from whom it was seized had high expectations of realizing that \$150 million from their American "clients". So, I must ask, if alcohol and tobacco are legal, ranted against, dangerous and providing huge tax revenues, why do we outlaw marijuana?

And we can go a step further. Our war on drugs is a failure-period! The hard stuff has terrible effects and is difficult to withdraw from; kind of like tobacco and alcohol. And one side effect of our "war" is the current chaos in Tijuana, Nogales, Juarez and Nuevo Laredo. I very firmly believe that use of these drugs is terrible and we must continue efforts to stop people from using them; efforts like those of my parents. But the effects of outlawing their use are a disaster. Our jails are full, crime supporting habits abounds and Mexico, because it has the misfortune to lay between producers and users of drugs, is in mortal danger.

How about tax revenues instead?