

## **Missouri's Yes on Prop B Campaign Letters to the Editor Guide**

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are an effective way to promote the Missouri tobacco tax campaign and raise awareness of what Proposition B would mean for your community. They can be used proactively to help get out the vote on Prop B or raise awareness about a Yes on Prop B bus tour event; or reactively to comment on an article or an opinion piece to help keep Prop B positively portrayed in the media. Please consider utilizing the template letters below or to use the message points as a guide to write your own letters.

### **Here are a few tips for successful placement of letters to the editor:**

- Localize the letter
- Include a personal connection (i.e. the writer should mention that he/she is a cancer survivor, parent, teacher or nurse)
- Always include a call to action – Vote Yes on Prop B!
- If a letter is reacting to another article or an event, try to submit to the paper within 48-hours
- Keep the letter to 200 words or less (in some papers the word limit is even less, so check ahead)
- If possible, submit it directly to an editor via your personal e-mail account
- Make sure that multiple letters sent to the same newspaper are different enough that it doesn't appear that multiple people are sending the same letter
- Choose your moments wisely -- a paper won't run a multiple letters from the same person in a short period of time

### **The following are sample letters to the editor in support of Prop B (each around 200 words):**

#### **Letter # 1 (General)**

##### **Yes on Prop B is the Right Choice for Missouri**

Missourians pay for having the lowest tobacco tax in the country in so many ways. Missouri spends more than \$2 billion annually in health care costs directly related to smoking. We can't afford to continue on this path.

Proposition B is our chance to break old habits. It would increase the state tobacco tax by 73 cents and generate \$283 million every year for investments back into our communities. Missouri has never invested money into smoking cessation and prevention– but Prop B would change that by directing 20 percent of the revenue from the tax to these lifesaving programs. And the other 80 percent would be invested directly into our children's schools, colleges and universities.

Not only would Prop B raise much-needed money for Missouri, but it would save lives from cancer and other lethal diseases caused by tobacco. With the 11<sup>th</sup> highest smoking rate in the country, we can't ignore the impact that this change would have on our health and education.

The money from Prop B will be protected from politicians' hands, and you won't pay the tax if you don't smoke. Voting Yes on Prop B on November 6 is the right choice for me and for all Missouri families.

[Name]

[Hometown]

## Letter # 2 (Bus Tour)

### Vote Yes on Prop B for Missouri Schools

[This weekend/On day], the Yes on Prop B Bus Tour [will drive/rolled] through my town spreading its message of the importance of saving lives and investing in our state's education by increasing Missouri's tobacco tax.

The school bus tour, which launched Oct. 1, and is a part of Show-Me A Brighter Future's campaign in support of a 73-cent tobacco tax increase in Missouri. [My city/name city] is one of 20 that will see the bus during its trip through the state to emphasize Proposition B's enormous benefits for Missouri public schools and universities.

Prop B would generate \$283 million annually in new revenue for Missouri. Eighty percent of that money would be dedicated to elementary, secondary and university education, and the other 20 percent would fund much-needed smoking cessation and prevention programs to keep our kids from ever starting the deadly habit.

We have the power to reduce smoking in Missouri and to provide new funding for our public schools, colleges and universities. When you see the Yes on Prop B Bus in your town, come on out to show your support. And on November 6, vote yes on Prop B and help save lives and invest in education for our families.

[Name]

[Hometown]

## Letter # 3 (Cancer patient/caregiver/survivor)

### Break Old Habits, Vote Yes on Prop B

Voting yes on Proposition B is Missouri's chance to break old habits. Our state has never invested money into smoking cessation and prevention, but Prop B's 73-cent tobacco tax increase would change that by directing 20 percent of the revenue from the tax to these lifesaving programs and giving people the resources they need to quit.

After [INSERT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH CANCER], I know first-hand how important it is to fight cancer and other lethal diseases caused by tobacco. Research shows that this proposed tax increase would prevent more than 40,000 kids from becoming addicted adult smokers and would cause more than 33,000 adult smokers to quit.

A yes vote on Prop B would save more lives from cancer and invest in a brighter future for our children. Voting Yes on Prop B is the right choice for Missourians on November 6.

[Name]

[Hometown]

## Letter # 4 (Parent)

### **Prop B Invests in Our Children's Futures**

Being a parent comes with constant concern about the environment our children grow up in. I worry about sending my [son/daughter/children] to the right schools and making healthy choices for [him/her/them]. Right now, Missouri isn't investing all it can to ensure a brighter future for our children. A vote in favor of Proposition B can change that.

Prop B is Missouri's chance to set an example and break one of our worst habits—having the lowest tobacco tax in the country. Prop B will also provide much-needed funding for Missouri education.

By increasing the tobacco tax by 73 cents, Prop B would generate \$283 million each year and give it directly back into our communities. Missouri has never invested money into smoking cessation and prevention— but Prop B would direct 20 percent of the revenue from the tax to these lifesaving programs. The other 80 percent would be invested directly into our children's schools, colleges and universities.

Research shows that increasing tobacco taxes is the single most effective way to stop kids from smoking before they ever start. This increase would prevent more than 40,000 kids from becoming addicted to tobacco products.

As a [mom/dad], I know that voting yes on Prop B on November 6 is the right choice for my family.

[Name]

[Hometown]

### **Build Your Own Letter to the Editor**

The following points can be used to build your own letters to the editor. Remember to make your letter personal, localize it and include a strong call to action – vote yes on Prop B on November 6!

#### **Why a Tobacco Tax Makes Sense**

- Missouri's tobacco tax is just 17 cents per cigarettes pack – by far the lowest in the country. But every pack of cigarettes that is smoked costs taxpayers? \$10.47 in health spending and lost productivity.
- For every 10 percent increase in the retail price of a pack of cigarettes, youth smoking rates drop by 6.5 percent and overall cigarette consumption declines by 4 percent. (Should/Can we add the average increase in price that the MO tax would create?)
- Scientific research has shown that raising tobacco taxes is one of the most effective ways to encourage adults to quit smoking and to stop kids from ever starting the deadly habit.

## **The Problem in Missouri**

- Missouri has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest smoking rate in the country; 21 percent of adults smoke.
- Missouri also currently has the lowest cigarette tax in the country, and this increase would still keep it well under the national average of \$1.49 per pack.
- 19.5 percent of high school students smoke and 8,600 Missouri kids start smoking each year.
- Missouri currently does not fund smoking education, cessation or prevention programs, making it very hard for those who want to quit to find resources to improve their health.

## **The Economic Costs of Tobacco in Missouri**

- Tobacco use costs each Missouri household \$565 annually in public expenditures.
- Annually, Missouri spends \$2.13 billion on healthcare costs directly related to smoking and \$532 million in related Medicaid program costs.
- Smoking costs Missouri businesses \$2.51 billion in lost productivity.

## **Benefits of a Missouri Tax Increase by the Numbers**

- This tax increase would generate \$283 million annually starting January 1, 2013.
- According to research, this proposed tax increase would prevent 40,100 kids from becoming addicted adult smokers and would cause 33,300 adult smokers to quit.
- Missouri would realize \$1.37 billion in health savings from declines in smoking.

## **How the Money Will Be Spent**

- 20 percent of revenue would fund much-needed prevention and cessation programs for smokers who want to quit and to keep kids from starting to smoke.
- 50 percent of revenue would go into Missouri's elementary and secondary education classrooms. New funding for elementary and secondary education would help prevent staff reductions and increased classroom sizes.
- 30 percent of revenue would go to Missouri's colleges and universities. New funding for higher education will support educational opportunities for tomorrow's workforce and future caregivers.

## **Why is Prop B Good for Missouri?**

- 50 percent of revenue would go into Missouri's elementary and secondary education classrooms to help prevent staff reductions and increased classroom sizes.
- 30 percent of revenue would go to Missouri's colleges and universities to support educational opportunities for tomorrow's workforce and future caregivers.
- The money from Prop B will be protected from politicians' hands, and you don't pay if you don't smoke.
- It has been proven the single most effective way to stop kids from smoking before they ever start.

## **Calls to Action**

- As a parent, I know that voting yes on Prop B is good for my family and good for Missouri.
- Join me on November 6 and vote yes on Prop B.
- Help save lives and invest in our children's future by voting yes on Prop B.
- Show your support for Prop B and see the bus roll through your city on [DATE].
- Keep our kid's best interest in mind and vote yes on Prop B on November 6.
- Vote YES on Prop B on November 6!