Every so often, a measure is placed on the ballot that divides people and organizations that are normally aligned. Such is the case with Proposition 86 on the November ballot – the Tobacco Tax Initiative.

Proposition 86 is a positive attempt to reduce smoking, especially teen smoking, and thereby reduce both the public and private costs of health care in California.

In California alone, it is estimated that nearly 50,000 teenagers under 18 start smoking each year. By increasing the price through additional taxes, we hope to discourage young people from spending their money on smoking.

Smoking is expensive. It is estimated that we spend over $75 billion in the U.S. on health care costs related to smoking. That is a phenomenal number by any measure and every business and individual in our state is paying a higher health insurance premium as a result.

A recent study by the California Department of Health Services found that Proposition 86 will prevent more than 700,000 kids now under the age of 17 from becoming smokers, save 300,000 lives from smoking-related deaths and save nearly $16.5 billion in health care costs.

Proposition 86 will provide funding for a wide variety of programs: children’s health insurance ($367 million), emergency care services ($756 million), nurse education ($91 million), emergency physicians ($66 million), disease prevention, treatment and research ($364 million), tobacco-use prevention and control ($193 million), community clinics ($58 million) and early childhood programs ($180 million).

We would have preferred that the number of programs funded were more limited. But overall, we believe Proposition 86 is a measure that deserves your support. The cost of health care for each of us is increasing much faster than the rate of inflation, and this is one step we can take to reduce the root cause of so many visits to our doctors and hospitals.

We don’t take our position lightly – the Chamber’s Board discussed it extensively. We don’t like new taxes any more than you do. But this is a specific tax aimed at a specific purpose and paid for by those whose lifestyle choices are costing all of us money on our health insurance premiums.

We also don’t like the possibility that this proposition could negatively impact retailers and others who manufacture, distribute and transport these products. But we believe that the overall savings in health care costs will benefit everyone in our state and will be worth the negative impact that some businesses will bear.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote yes on Proposition 86.

And that’s The Business Perspective.

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The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben, President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.

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