



The Daily Astorian



Astoria, Oregon

Tuesday, November 06, 2007

Tobacco tax increase fails in Oregon; local supporters are aghast

The Daily Astorian and The Associated Press

Tuesday, November 06, 2007

Updated 11:24 p.m.

After a campaign marked by record amounts of tobacco industry money pouring into TV advertising, a cigarette tax increase to pay for children's health care was soundly defeated by Oregon voters in Tuesday's special election.

With 54 percent of the expected vote counted, Measure 50 was being rejected by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent. Among Oregon's 36 counties, the cigarette tax passed only in populous Multnomah County, but was crushed in most other places.

It was a defeat for backers of the "Healthy Kids" plan. They had spent the campaign's final days going door-to-door, pleading with voters to ignore the cigarette makers' \$12 million ad blitz and approve the increase to extend health coverage to 100,000 uninsured children.

The measure was opposed by 7,627 voters (58.4 percent) in Clatsop County and supported by 5,433 votes (41.6 percent).

"I was stunned that people who don't smoke, voted against it," said Jim Coffee, executive director of Coastal Family Health in Astoria. He said he never thought Measure 50 had a good chance of passing because the tobacco companies, which opposed it, are so well funded and were able to make the fact that the measure would change the state Constitution an issue.

As a result, Coffee said, "Kids who might have been covered will remain uninsured. We'll still see them, but they'll likely be sicker when they come in."

He said he hopes Congress will be successful in getting "S CHIP" - a state children's health insurance program - past the president.

Opponents of the measure were jubilant.

"I'm pretty elated about it. People have made a resounding statement that our government needs to be more responsible with taxpayers' money," said John Harper, owner of three tobacco stores: Cigarettes Under the Bridge in Astoria, Scappoose Smoke Shop and Seaside Tobacco Outlet.

"This isn't a victory for 'big tobacco.' It's a victory for the people of Oregon," Harper said. He thanked voters for "using common sense and sending a clear message: No new taxes."

However, Alissa Dorman, chairwoman of Tobacco Free Coalition of Clatsop County, also blames the tobacco industry for Measure 50's defeat. "They're sneaky and clever and have tons of money," said Dorman, who is also a counselor at Tongue Point Job Corps and smoking cessation coordinator for Columbia Memorial Hospital.

"Regardless, myself and the Tobacco Free Coalition of course will continue with tobacco prevention efforts and continue assisting people who want to quit their addiction," Dorman said.

Related Links

Content © 2007 The Daily Astorian
Software © 1998-2007 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved