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Cancer Society protests Jindal veto

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Supporters of overriding Gov. Bobby Jindal's veto of a cigarette tax renewal rally Tuesday at the Governor's Mansion in Baton Rouge. James Terry/For The News-Star

Written by **Mike Hasten**

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BATON ROUGE — Gov. Bobby Jindal sent the wrong [message](#) to young people when he vetoed legislation that would have continued a 4-cents tax on a pack of cigarettes, proponents of overriding the veto said Tuesday.

"This is a defining moment, as far as we are concerned," said Steve Monaghan, president of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers.

Monaghan said the governor's stand shows "there's obviously a flip-flop in his position. "» In vetoing this, he's saying, "I'm in support of cancer and childhood smoking and the horrible history of this product.—

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He points to an article Jindal wrote as secretary of the Department of Health and Hospitals in which he says smokers and other risk-takers should pay more for their health care and "One solution is to utilize prospective rather than retributive payments for smokers, e.g, higher [taxes](#) or premiums" rather than reducing their care.

Monaghan joined representatives of the American Cancer Society and Progress Louisiana gathered outside the gates of the Governor's Mansion on Tuesday to protest the governor's veto and went to the Capitol to lobby legislators to vote to override the governor's decision.

"The governor single-handedly lowered the price of cigarettes," said Andrew Muhl, government relations director for the American Cancer Society of Louisiana. "He made them more [affordable](#) for young people. He sent a terrible message to our youth.

"The public is on the right side of this issue and the Legislature is on the right side of this issue," Muhl said. "We're urging the Legislature to override the governor's veto."

"Override the veto" the gathering of about 25 sign-waving people chanted under the shade of pine trees along Capitol Access Road.

The protest was originally planned as a rally to urge Jindal to sign the legislation into law, permanently renewing the tax. But the governor issued his veto Monday night, so the rally turned into a

protest.

"We recognize he is against taxes but this is not a new tax," Muhl said. "It generates \$48 million in health care [funds](#) at a time when we have a financial crisis and a health care crisis."

The tax generates

\$12 million a year but when used for [health care](#), it gets matching federal funds that would bring it to \$48 million a year.

Without the reduction, Louisiana's cigarette tax is the third lowest in the nation at 36 cents a pack. Neighboring states are much higher.

"Vetoing this bill is one of the worst choices a

leader can make," said Eddie Ashworth, director of the Louisiana [Budget](#) Project. "It is bad policy for the health of our state and it is bad fiscal policy to reduce revenues when the state already is facing a budget crisis."

Monaghan said his primary question for Jindal is "Why? Why would he take this position on this issue when the state needs health care dollars? Why would he push this

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