

June 19, 2026

Remarks for Denver Henderson, Government Relations Director in Montana for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Hello everyone,

I wanted to share with you my remarks for Friday. Currently it's timed right at 5 minutes.

Good afternoon. My name is Denver Henderson, and I am the Government Relations Director in Montana for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (aka ACS CAN).

We are proud to be a member of the Montana Kids Vs. Big Tobacco Coalition, working alongside our partners with American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, and many other public health organizations.

On behalf of the Montana Kids Coalition it's my pleasure to welcome you. Thank you for being here.

We're here to share new statewide polling that shows Montana voters strongly support raising taxes on all tobacco products.

My colleague from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids will share those poll results in a few minutes.

Just as importantly, we're also here to hear directly from Montana youth and from someone who works with students every day about what the impact from tobacco use looks like in real life.

We know this isn't always easy to talk about, and we appreciate the young people who are willing to share their experiences.

Before we invite our guest speakers I'd like to say a few words about the Coalition, why our work is important to the future of our state, and why now is the right time to increase tobacco taxes.

Working with our partner organizations we formed the MT Kids Coalition in 2002 with the mission of protecting Montana's youth against the dangers of tobacco addiction and to counter the influence of commercial tobacco marketing.

Each year the tobacco industry spends \$29 million dollars in Montana alone trying desperately to keep people who use tobacco addicted, normalize smoking in our communities, and trick the next generation into a lifetime of addiction and an early death.

Over the last 20-plus years the MT Kids Coalition has worked with Republicans and Democrats, and everyone in between to protect Montana's kids and public health in general from the scourge of Big Tobacco.

Together we have...

- Secured and increased funding for tobacco education and cessation so fewer youth and young adults start smoking in the first place and have the resources and support they need to quit.
- We passed the Clean Indoor Air Act in 2005 protecting the rights of customers and workers to breathe clean air.
- And just last year we helped pass legislation adding e-cigarettes to Montana's smoke free laws.
- Along with fighting the relentless effort of the tobacco industry and their lobbyists to roll back the progress we've made in the name of corporate profits.

Montanans have historically valued the right to enjoy a clean and healthful environment.

But those words enshrined in our constitution extend beyond our public lands to include the communities where we live - the places we shop, work, learn and play.

Montana's cigarette tax was last increased in 2005 when Montana voters passed ballot initiative 149 and it has not been increased one dime in the last 2 decades.

Think about that. A lot has changed in 2 decades. That was before the first smart phone. Before Instagram and Twitter that people use every day.

And since then the other states and DC have put into place nearly 100 statewide cigarette tax increases. To put it simply, Montana is falling behind.

Tobacco takes both a health and economic toll on our state.

It has a real impact on what our kids perceive as normal behavior, and it has a real financial cost to the state.

Each year smoking costs Montana taxpayers \$511 million in tobacco related healthcare expenses.

That's \$957 per household just from smoking-caused government expenditures.

It drives up the costs of Montana's Medicaid program.

And it costs the state in the 1,600 deaths each year related to smoking.

Increasing the cigarette tax by at least \$2 per pack with a parallel tax on all other tobacco products also creates an opportunity to fund critical projects important to our communities.

Every year funds from the tobacco tax are put to good use supporting healthcare for children and low-wage workers in Montana, housing and healthcare for our veterans, infrastructure and building needs, and many other services and programs funded by state government.

Increasing the cigarette tax by \$2.00 per pack with a parallel tax on all other tobacco products would generate revenue, protect kids, and save lives.

In fact, the much-needed revenue it would generate could provide a reliable funding source for vital programs throughout the state.

With that context in mind, I would like to invite our first speaker.