

The Senate Side

February 15, 2008

by State Senator John Putney

A letter received this week from the Iowa Department of Public Health Director, Thomas Newton, revealed that **\$596,000** has been spent on recent advertisements promoting smoke-free bars and restaurants.

The ads feature restaurant and bar workers talking about their work environments and how “everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air.” I’m sure that many of you have seen them. The ads had no mention of the negative effects and consequences of smoking and were primarily run in the Des Moines Metro area. This comes as the issue of banning smoking throughout Iowa in all public places heats up and, more than likely, will be voted upon in the very near future.

In his letter, Newton also stated that of the \$596,000, “\$126,000 is from the Healthcare Trust and **\$470,000** is from the General Fund.” These funds come directly from taxpayer money. This is not an educational issue. People know that smoking is bad for you and I support efforts to diminish smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke. However, in my opinion, it’s the principal of the matter that taxpayer money is being used for this purpose. When I voted for an increase in the tobacco tax last year, I was promised by the majority that the funds generated would be placed in the Healthcare Trust Fund. If we are going to conduct an advertising campaign promoting a ban on smoking, then the total cost should be paid from the Healthcare Trust Fund rather than 80% of it financed from the General Fund. I see this as an inappropriate use of funds for promoting legislation that, arguably, infringes on the basic rights of property owners, the free market system, and freedom of choice.

Your thoughts and opinions are important to me. Please contact me at: 515-281-3371 or john.putney@legis.state.ia.us