

Dear **(name of editor if you know it)**:

Imagine a city of 45,000 individuals, just under the population of the City of Ft. Myers, Florida, with ***no*** health insurance.

Imagine that all the uninsured people who live there are elderly or medically needy or disabled. And imagine the rest of the citizens of Florida, and its Legislature, turning their backs on them – eliminating the healthcare programs that provide life-saving coverage for their healthcare needs.

As difficult as it is to image that this could happen, the prospect is quite high that this scenario could play out in the upcoming legislative session. Without additional revenues to plug a projected \$4 billion hole in next year's state budget, the Legislature may seek to eliminate the Medicaid Medically Needy and Medicaid Aged/Disabled programs. The suffering from that decision will extend beyond the 45,000 Floridians who will lose coverage and impact the healthcare community as it struggles to fill the \$782 million gap in coverage this cut will create.

Other programs will be severely affected as well: Florida residencies for physicians who provide care for 75 percent of indigent and uninsured patients; education for nurses where there already exists a shortage; and biomedical research. All will be negatively impacted.

While the current economic crisis is affecting every level of our society, there may be one remedy that can improve healthcare for Floridians and at the same time fund programs to assist those in medical need.

An increase in the state tobacco sales tax of \$1.00 per pack would provide over \$1 billion in revenue that could be used to provide a dedicated funding source for the Medicaid Medically Needy and the Medicaid Aged/Disabled programs. Moreover, an increase in tobacco taxes is the *only* demonstrated way of reducing smoking rates for both youth and adults. Over time, the current \$6.2 billion spent in caring for smoking-related illnesses will fall as a result of reduced cigarette use and lower healthcare costs.

As someone who lives and works in this beautiful state, I have great expectations that our Legislature will be bold in addressing our budget challenges by supporting an increase in the tobacco tax and provide a permanent solution to funding the Medicaid Medically Needy and Medicaid Aged/Disabled programs. To learn more about the tax, please visit: www.fha.org/coalition.

Together, we can ensure continued coverage for 45,000 needy Floridians and reduce smoking among our state's youth.

Sincerely,

(your name and full address)