

New cigarette tax could trigger deadly crime wave in USA, warn Libertarians

Tax hike will be cash bonanza for organized crime, charge Libertarians

WASHINGTON, DC — A federal proposal to raise the price of cigarettes by \$1.10 a pack may not reduce teenage smoking — but it *will* probably leave dead bodies littering America's streets, the Libertarian Party warned today.

"This will be the most *deadly* tax increase in American history," predicted Steve Dasbach, the party's national chairman. "This tax will boost the price of cigarettes so much that they'll become irresistible to organized crime — exactly as has happened in Europe."

This week, the Senate Commerce Committee endorsed a plan to force tobacco companies to pay "licensing fees" that would boost the cost of cigarettes by \$1.10 a pack. And 26 states are considering additional tax hikes on cigarettes. As a result, cigarettes in America could cost more than \$3.56 a pack by the year 2002.

Unfortunately, such tax hikes ignore the bloody price that society will pay, said Dasbach.

"This cigarette tax hike is a recipe for Prohibition III — following the same blood-soaked trail as Alcohol Prohibition and Drug Prohibition," he said. "And, as with previous experiments in prohibition, law-abiding citizens will suffer and criminals will prosper."

What can Americans expect? Just look at Germany, where cigarettes already cost \$3.60 a pack — and the high price has spawned a thriving criminal industry in smuggling.

- In Berlin, "the smuggling of cigarettes [caused] a surge in gangland-style executions and turf wars [that] made Berlin streets more dangerous than at any time since World War II," reported the *Washington Times*.
- "People are being executed in cold blood in their apartments and in broad daylight on the streets," said Detlef Schade, a police detective in Berlin.
- "Turf battles between the gangs that control street-level sales have been blamed for the deaths of 40 [people in 1996]," reported *USA Today*. It's "the latest episode in a bloody gang war over Berlin's lucrative trade in smuggled cigarettes."

But Washington politicians seem determined to ignore these lessons, and inflict the same bloody crime wave on America, charged Dasbach.

"Politicians may think they are striking a blow against Big Tobacco — but they are actually striking it rich for criminal gangs," he said. "The biggest beneficiaries of this new tax will be the Mafia, the Asian Triads, the biker gangs, and the Russian mob. And the biggest victims will be ordinary Americans who will die in the crossfire as criminal gangs battle for the blood-stained profits that politicians seem determined to give them."