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Proposed 25-Cent Boost in Cigarette Tax Rejected

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK, Times Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO—A proposed constitutional amendment to raise the cigarette tax by 25 cents a pack to pay for cancer research and other smoking-related programs died in an Assembly committee Monday without winning a single vote.

A coalition of supporters that includes the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Assn. and the California Medical Assn. immediately said it would decide within the next 30 days whether to proceed with its legislative campaign to put the proposal on the ballot in 1988.

The constitutional amendment, jointly authored by Democratic Assemblyman Lloyd Olsen of Sacramento and Republican Assemblyman William J. Flante of Greenbrae, would raise an estimated \$500 million a year that would be devoted exclusively to smoking-related programs such as anti-smoking education and research, and the treatment of diseases linked to smoking.

Connelly said the proposal would save more than 20,000 lives by deterring Californians from smoking—particularly

teen-agers who would be the most likely to be affected by a sharp increase in the price of cigarettes. The cigarette tax has not been raised from its current level of 10 cents a pack for 20 years, he noted.

The Tobacco Institute, which has led opposition around the nation to anti-smoking laws, contributed \$123,000 during the 1985-86 session to the campaigns of 73 of the state's 120 legislators. The contributions included a total of \$16,000 to Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee Chairman John Kline (D-San Leandro) and the other lawmakers who were on the panel.

The measure, however, quickly came under fire in the committee from members who opposed a tax increase. Opponents of the proposal, including representatives representing the Lung Assn. and the California Dental Assn., were not even permitted by Kline to present the testimony they had prepared.

"We didn't get very much consideration," Connelly said afterward. "These

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measures are controversial at best and opposed vigorously by the tobacco industry.

The most vociferous opposition to the bill came from Assemblyman Richard Floyd (D-Hayward), who smoked both a cigarette and a cigar during the debate. Floyd, a recipient of \$1,000 in campaign contributions from the Tobacco Institute last session, argued that raising the price of cigarettes by 25 cents would prompt gangsters to smuggle cigarettes into the state and sell them at reduced prices.

"This bill is a direct invitation to the mob to come into California and do business," he said.

Assemblyman Dave Elder (D-Long Beach), another recipient of \$1,000 in donations from the Tobacco Institute, called for a more positive way of deterring smokers than raising the tax—something akin to the \$100 reward he received from his grandfather for not smoking until he reached the age of 21.

Against Specifics

And Assembly Majority Leader Thomas M. Hannigan (D-Fairfield), who also received \$3,000 from the Tobacco Institute, argued that a constitutional amendment raising a tax should not specify how the money should be spent.

The Deukmejian Administration

also opposed the bill, saying it would raise taxes by more than \$600 million. The Administration also was opposed to committing the funds only to smoking-related programs.

Despite the committee's rejection of the measure, opinion polls show the public overwhelmingly favors an increase in the cigarette tax. A recent California Poll indicates that more than two-thirds of those surveyed support increasing the tax to as much as 30 cents a pack. A similar result was reached in a poll conducted by supporters of the constitutional amendment; 68% of those surveyed favored a tax hike for cigarettes.