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Tobacco program could go up in smoke

Regardless of what one thinks of Gov. Chris Christie's approach to balancing the state budget, the end result is that many important state-funded programs will be cut or completely eliminated ("Trenton mayor calls Christie plan 'catastrophe' -- \$34M in aid would be eliminated," **March 17**).

One such program slated to be eliminated is New Jersey's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program (CTCP). Eliminating the CTCP would be short-sighted and equivalent to one of the "quick fixes" Gov. Christie rallies against. It would eliminate a relatively small line item in this year's budget in exchange for greater tobacco-related costs in future budget years.

Tobacco use costs New Jersey more than \$3 billion in health-care expenditures each year, with nearly a billion dollars paid by New Jersey state Medicaid. The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids estimates that New Jersey households carry a \$660 tobacco-related tax burden each year. Cutting tobacco cessation services will ultimately worsen the financial burden New Jersey citizens suffer, and in this economy, we cannot afford that.

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