

## Conservatives Have Nothing to Fear in Closing Tax Loophole

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True conservatives, and the voters who elect them to office, know the only good tax loophole is a dead tax loophole.

And 25 House Republicans helped kill a tax loophole on Wednesday, May 13, when they voted for House Bill 2154 by state Rep. Al Edwards, D-Houston. The legislation, which goes now to the Senate, will repay the student loans of doctors who agree to practice in medically underserved areas of the state.

To fund the loan repayments, HB 2154 closes an excise tax loophole on smokeless tobacco that has inexplicably persisted for years. The measure taxes smokeless tobacco on a per unit basis – just as the state does cigarettes and alcohol – instead of on its sales price.

It makes perfect sense, and it's fair. That's why Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) have endorsed this approach. If the state is applying a tax – and, for the record, the Texas Association of Business, has an unmatched history of opposing tax increases in this state – common sense says the tax must be applied evenly. Government cannot be picking winners and losers.

So I am going to have to disagree with my friends who posted editorial commentary on The Texas Insider trying to tar those House Republicans with the tax-increase brush. I'm sorry but when you try to portray Republican Rep. Warren Chisum as a tax-and-spender ... I just can't go there.

Closing the excise tax loophole on smokeless tobacco is not a tax increase. The excise tax on smokeless tobacco already exists in state law. HB 2154 simply applies the exact same tobacco excise tax on all smokeless products. That's good, because every time, we close a tax loophole, it's a victory for all taxpayers.

Finally, the claim that voters are going to punish lawmakers for treating all smokeless tobacco products the same, is patently absurd. I find it hard to imagine that Republican voters want to punish lawmakers for closing a tax loophole to fund a program designed to help attract doctors to medically underserved areas.

Rep. Warren Chisum, and others, identified a great way to help attract physicians to rural Texas, and the 114 Texas counties that are currently underserved. That's why TAB was proud to get behind this legislation early on. We salute all the members who rose above misleading claims to support this measure, now contained in HB 2154.

Let's be consistent in our anti-tax rhetoric. If new taxes are bad, tax loopholes are just as evil. Conservatives need to oppose both, and quit cutting each other up.