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## USING VICE TO FUND SOMETHING VIRTUOUS

By EDWIN H. MOORE

**“Smoke Ed Reform cigarettes. It’s for the children!” It will become our patriotic duty and our civic responsibility to smoke.**

Well, just when we thought that perhaps we had seen it all in the dreadful, painful television ads with those arcane references and more-than-convoluted pleas for kids not to smoke, we find ourselves with a major candidate for Florida public office basing his financial plan for education on smokers. You know the ads—the “Truth” ads that have used about every pop reference available, stretched the limits of subliminal appeal, and used everything from floating eyeballs to Spanish-speaking cowboys to giant, dying subway rats to make the point that smoking is bad. Lord only knows how much money has been spent on this campaign or even how much influence it has had. My kids think the concepts are ridiculous, but maybe they are blessed with intellects a little higher than the target audience. My suspicion is the target audience might have to have only an IQ slightly higher than the dying rat for these ads to have impact.

However, all this might need to change if one candidate for Florida governor has his way. Bill McBride, in competing for the nomination of the Florida Democrat Party, has made a 50 cents per pack of cigarettes increase a cornerstone of his education funding program.

It is easy to see the possibilities. No longer would smokers be labeled with the societal stigmas presented by the “Truth” campaign. No longer would tobacco companies be forced to worry about whether they marketed to children. After all, smoking will once again become the norm. It can be remarketed in an entirely new way.

“Smoke Ed Reform cigarettes. It’s for the children!”

It will become our patriotic duty and our civic responsibility to smoke. After all, improving our education system will

depend on increasing the number of packs sold in Florida. And the only way to do that (if the price per pack is going to increase again) will be to create a strong marketing campaign extolling the community-based virtues of lighting up. Otherwise, customary market forces will surely lead to a reduction in packs sold due to the increase in prices. Candidate desires and campaign gimmickry can not alter the laws of diminishing returns.

Can’t you see the would-be governor now? Slickly packaged public service announcements will spotlight him sitting in a public school classroom, surrounded by smiling children. A pack of Lucky’s will be rolled up in his sleeve and a thin haze of smoke will fill the air. After all, “It’s for the children.”

For many years now we’ve witnessed the use of state-sponsored gambling as a funding source for education. The lottery extols the major role it has played in financing Florida education by the McDonaldization of the same subliminal message McBride would put forth for smoking. “Over \$\_\_ billions for Florida Education” is the message repeatedly used just as if there have been “Over \_\_billion served.” As we move from one vice to another in building the funding foundation for our future education system, we have to wonder—Are we using all the wrong messages to teach our children? What’s next? Will we see a candidate for political office saying the real source for education funding should be an increase in the alcohol tax? “Education funding. It just doesn’t get any better than this!”

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