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***Yes: Flavored tobacco ban protects kids, saves lives***

Cotton candy. Gummy bears. Cookies and cream. Once nothing more than flavors of candy stocked in grocery store checkout lines, today they’re the key to Big Tobacco’s billion-dollar marketing scheme to get California kids hooked on nicotine for life. To save lives, save taxpayer dollars and protect kids from a lifelong addiction to nicotine — vote “yes” on Proposition 31 this November.

**Big Tobacco knows how deadly its products are. Tobacco-related diseases are the leading cause of preventable death in California, killing nearly 110 people every single day; and of all the kids who become new smokers each year, almost a third will ultimately die from it. That’s why the Big Tobacco business model relies on hooking a new generation of loyal customers to their deadly products, calling them “replacement smokers.” Deliberately targeting kids with candy-flavored tobacco products has yielded Big Tobacco a bumper crop of young customers, creating a youth electronic cigarette epidemic.**

**It’s no surprise that 96 percent of high school e-cigarette users in California use flavored e-cigarettes.** The impact of flavored tobacco goes beyond just kids. For decades, tobacco companies pushed menthol cigarettes — the original candy-flavored tobacco — to Black smokers. Menthol is a cooling chemical that soothes the throat, masking the harsh taste of traditional tobacco and allowing smokers to inhale the nicotine more deeply. Menthol cigarettes make it harder to quit smoking as well. Big Tobacco handed out packs of menthols for free and continues to set menthol prices lower in Black neighborhoods than in White neighborhoods. As a result, 85 percent of Black Americans who smoke use menthols — up from just 10 percent in the 1950s.

Earlier this year, San Diego city leaders were right to pass a strong local ordinance banning candy-flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, within the city’s limits. More than 100 other California jurisdictions have passed similar legislation. Meanwhile, in unprotected cities and counties, tobacco companies are hooking new customers every day. While this patchwork of local policies represents a significant victory against Big Tobacco, it is not enough to protect the next generation from tobacco use.

Voting “yes” on Proposition 31 creates a uniform policy that covers the entire state. Tobacco companies would no longer be able to sell candy-flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, anywhere in California. Pediatricians, public health organizations and dozens of scientific researchers agree that when tobacco is sold in sweet and candy flavors, kids, women and minorities are more likely to get hooked on nicotine for life.

**Taking candy-flavored tobacco off store shelves would prevent countless youth from ever trying tobacco, which is why a coalition of public health groups led by the American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is urging California voters to support Proposition 31.**

**“Yes” on Proposition 31 isn’t just good for kids’ health, it’s a relief on taxpayers’ wallets, especially at a time when inflation is soaring and everyone is feeling the pinch. Big Tobacco’s cycle of addiction, disease and death has lined the industry’s pockets with massive profits — sticking everyone else with the bill. Every time tobacco companies addict a new generation of kids on nicotine, they put Californians — including nonsmokers — on the hook for billions of dollars in health-care related costs.**

**Ending the sale of candy-flavored tobacco products is a proven, effective policy solution to reduce youth tobacco use. High school cigarette smoking in San Francisco reached historic lows of just 1.6 percent after its local ban took effect. In addition, both high school vaping and smoking declined following Oakland’s flavor ban.**

**Proposition 31 is a fight between California and Big Tobacco to protect the health of our kids and communities, and the choice before voters on the November ballot this year is very clear. You can either help tobacco companies turn kids into the next generation of nicotine addicts — or save lives, protect kids and put money back into taxpayers’ pockets by voting “yes” on Proposition 31 to get candy-flavored tobacco, including menthol cigarettes, out of our communities for good.**

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