Dear Members of the House Preventative Health Policy Division.

I am speaking to you today to voice my concerns on two controversial issues being proposed by both body of government & without any considerations to current social & economic hardships facing both, our great state’s residents & small businesses alike.

I own a small connivance store in North Minneapolis, an area not only designated disadvantaged federally but also by our state, county & City standards. I love my community & my Neighborhood, as a first-generation immigrant they took me in and showed me unconditional love. I wouldn’t be half the man I am today without them. I go out of my way to serve their needs and provide back to my community with whatever I can.

However, in recent years, the C-Store industry has become the battle ground for excessive regulations and meaningless BANS, on legal products readily available for adult use everywhere else. For instance, we get the blame as an industry for the increase of youth use/addiction to flavored tobacco and vape products although our stores are heavily regulated with 21-year old I.D requirements to access such products and in most cities a complete flavor bans in C-store locations are already in place. Meanwhile the same products are readily available online to anyone without any regulations or restrictions in our state.

The eagerness of some members of our MN House of Representatives to introduce a legislative Bill to ban Flavored Tobacco products STATEWIDE in the name of protecting our youth, without even considering the needs of adult users like myself that enjoys the habit without providing an outlet of exclusion to the law that would allow specialty tobacco stores to carry these products. Let’s keep in mind these products are already available for sale with less restrictions and lower taxes at every state that boarders Minnesota. I find this unacceptable & completely unfair. There is a push in our state for legalizing marijuana! Don’t these house members understand, some of these products are flavored?

Keeping tobacco and vape products out of the hands of minors is a goal we all strive to achieve. Banning legal products and raising tobacco taxes on the backs of struggling residents and small businesses will not achieve that goal. Local healthcare advocates and Special interest groups will tell you that raising taxes is the number one deterrent to youth tobacco use. Minnesota is already on of the highest tobacco taxed state. Minnesota also has already raised the age to purchase tobacco products to 21. Cities and counties across the state are banning the sale flavored tobacco and vape products. Obviously current policies aren’t working because of online loophole. Why not introduce legislative bills to address that instead of penalizing adult smokers and small stores

We all witnessed the devastating effects on small business in light of the murder of Gorge Floyd and the aftermath of the civil unrest followed by devastating effects due to closures and restrictions that are currently in effect, while our struggling small businesses received minimal support from our state.

Proposing a $1 tax increase per pack is absurd, frankly its robbery to a small segment of Minnesota residents. I dare you to propose a dollar tax increase per gallon of gas. How does the governor say on one hand, and I’m quoting, “I’m not gonna compromise on the safety of Minnesotans— especially students, small businesses, and working families,” then turn around and propose a $1 tax on the products we have left to sell?

While I don’t affiliate myself with either party, I am thankful that House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt recognizes that a vaping and cigarette tax will fall more heavily on lower-income residents. And for a Tweet from Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka that reads, “We must keep life affordable by not raising taxes on anyone, much less, small businesses…Nor should we have regressive tax increases on tobacco.” These comments give me hope this tax is not a done deal.

Respectfully

Kevin Aldwaik

651-246-7701

kevinaldwaik@yahoo.com