

# The Mercury News

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## Opinion: 2012 initiative will take aim at cancer — and tobacco

By Don Perata  
Special to the Mercury News

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Cancer is projected to become the leading cause of death worldwide this year. Without global action, the number of people living with — and dying from — the disease will triple by 2030.

As a cancer survivor, I'm overwhelmed by the toll this disease takes on humankind. Despite continuing advancements in medical treatment and prevention, cancer remains a leading cause of death in California, with more than 140,000 Californians diagnosed every year.

In economic terms, cancer's impact on California's fiscal well-being is far greater when viewed through the lens of the leading — and entirely preventable — cause of cancer: tobacco. Over the past decade, the tobacco industry has poured 10 times as many marketing dollars into California as the state has been able to invest in tobacco education. As a result, California loses \$9 billion in tobacco-related health care costs per year.

The California Cancer Research Act will help turn that tide. This initiative will dedicate more than \$500 million to the creation of new ways to prevent, detect, treat and cure cancer. It will fund anti-tobacco education efforts and save thousands of California residents from deadly smoking habits by creating a \$1 tax on packs of cigarettes.

Led by the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and endorsed by LIVESTRONG, supporters of the initiative, including

myself, recently turned in more than 634,000 signatures to qualify the measure for the 2012 presidential primary ballot. Volunteers, most of whom are cancer survivors and their families, collected more than 115,000 of those signatures. Their effort has been inspiring.

The Bay Area stands to benefit substantially from the act's passage, as it is home to the UC San Francisco Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center. As a National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center, the act will ensure that the center is well-positioned to apply for funding — it is estimated that the tax on cigarettes will raise about \$855 million per year at first, although that figure will decline as smoking wanes. In addition, the initiative will lead to the creation of new high-paying jobs and establish UC San Francisco as a leader in the global effort to combat cancer.

The act not only makes fiscal sense, but it is also a necessary investment in the future of our children. Funds raised through the proposed cigarette tax will protect them from secondhand smoke and teach millions of children the dangers of tobacco use, preventing more than 200,000 kids from becoming smokers themselves.

In supporting the act — learn more at [www.californiansforacure.org](http://www.californiansforacure.org) — Californians have the opportunity to strike a serious blow to cancer and set an example for the rest of the nation. Your support could help eradicate a disease that kills more than 50,000 California residents each year. Please consider joining us as we take a stand and

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pick a fight with cancer.

DON PERATA is prostate cancer survivor, a former California senator and current Oakland mayoral candidate. He will be participating in the LIVESTRONG Challenge Sunday in San Jose. He wrote this article for this newspaper.

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