



american society of internal medicine

May 30, 1996

Letter to House Appropriations, House Commerce, Senate Approp., and Senate Labor and Human Resources Committees

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REPRESENTING Internists and All Subspecialists of Internal Medicine

The Honorable Spencer Abraham United States Senate 245 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Abraham:

On behalf of the American Society of Internal Medicine (ASIM), I am writing to urge you to support the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) proposal to restrict the promotion and sale of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to children and adolescents. Furthermore, ASIM encourages you to reject the recent proposal made by Philip Morris and United States Tobacco (UST). The concessions the tobacco companies propose to make pale in comparison to what is necessary to ensure tobacco products are kept out of the hands of our nation's youth.

The FDA proposal comes at a time when the need is great. A recent report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that the proportion of high school students who reported having smoked within the previous thirty days had increased from 27.5% in 1991 to 34.8% in 1995. The survey also indicated that 77% of students under the age of 18 said that they were not asked to show proof of their age when buying cigarettes in stores. The FDA's proposal to make tobacco products less accessible and less attractive to young people must not be compromised.

The proposal made by the two leading tobacco companies is hollow as well as dangerous. The companies agree to make minimal reforms in return for the assurance that they will not be subjected to stronger regulations in the future. For example, while the Philip Morris/UST proposal includes a limitation on the tobacco industry's sponsorship of sporting events, it provides an exemption for the sports that currently attract the most tobacco dollars--motor sports and rodeo. Also, the proposal would eliminate FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products. As a result, no federal agency would be responsible for overseeing the activities of tobacco companies. This would effectively strip the public of its protection from the leading preventable cause of disability and premature death in our country.

Furthermore, the FDA proposal has enjoyed widespread support. A recent poll found that 61% of surveyed adults believe that the tobacco industry encourages teens to smoke. The proposal also has been endorsed by numerous health, medical, children's, and religious groups, as well as by 28 state attorney generals.

Again, ASIM requests that you support the FDA proposal to curtail tobacco promotion and distribution to children and adolescents and that you reject the proposal put forth by Philip Morris/UST that would preempt this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Alan R Nelson MD

Alan Nelson, MD Executive Vice President

2011 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW • SUITE 800 • WASHINGTON, DC 20006-1808 TELEPHONE: (202) 835-2746 • FAX: (202) 835-0443 • E-MAIL: asim@mem.po.com

