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american society of internal medicine
May 30, 1996

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Fortieth Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
October 10-13, 1996

REPRESENTING
Internists and
All Subspecialists
of Internal Medicine

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the American Society of Internal Medicine (ASIM), I am writing to urge you to stand firm against any tobacco industry-sponsored proposal that would undermine and/or preempt the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) proposal to restrict the promotion and sale of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to children and adolescents. Specifically, 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.

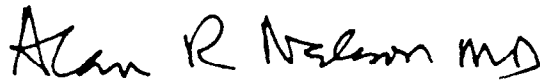
A recent report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that the proportion of high school students who reported having smoked within the previous thirty days had increased from 27.5% in 1991 to 34.8% in 1995. The survey also indicated that 77% of students under the age of 18 said that they were not asked to show proof of their age when buying cigarettes in stores. ASIM concurs with the Administration that the report is disturbing evidence that more and more teenagers are becoming lifelong smokers and that not enough is being done to prevent illegal tobacco sales to them.

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. The proposal lacks or dilutes crucial provisions in the FDA initiative. Also, it would eliminate FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products. As a result, no federal agency would be responsible for overseeing the activities of tobacco companies. We cannot afford to 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. The FDA's proposal to make tobacco products less accessible and less attractive to young people must not be compromised.

Again, ASIM applauds the FDA proposal to curtail tobacco promotion and distribution to children and adolescents and urges your continued support for it. The society also asks you to oppose the proposal put forth by Philip Morris/UST that would preempt this important initiative.

Sincerely,



Alan R. Nelson, MD
Executive Vice President

cc: Al Gore, Vice President; Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff; Harold Ickes, Assistant to the President
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