

January 25, 1999

President William Jefferson Clinton
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Clinton:

On behalf of the over 110,000 physician-members of the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), representing the nation's largest medical specialty, I commend you for the tobacco use reduction proposals that were included in your State of the Union address. ACP-ASIM is pleased that your administration is continuing to press forward in its efforts to curtail tobacco use, the largest preventable cause of death in this country today.

The College is particularly gratified to learn of the planned Justice Department lawsuit that will seek to recover from the tobacco industry the costs to Medicare and other federal health programs of smoking related illnesses. Internists, who are everyday witnesses to the devastating health effects of smoking are also all too painfully aware of the terrible financial toll taken by treatment of such illnesses. The costs to Medicare for providing health care for tobacco-caused disease are staggering. The tobacco industry should not be allowed to profit by transferring to the taxpayers the cost of medical care to treat diseases which its products cause.

ACP-ASIM further agrees that, although the settlement agreement reached last fall between the industry and 46 states is a step in the right direction, additional measures must be taken to substantially reduce tobacco use in this country. We congratulate you for renewing your administration's call for an increase in the price of cigarettes, reaffirmation of the Food and Drug Administration's full authority to keep cigarettes out of the hands of children and public health efforts to prevent youth smoking and hold the tobacco industry accountable for reducing youth smoking.

Raising cigarette prices through an increase in the federal excise tax would be an effective means of saving lives by reducing the number of children who acquire smoking as a lifetime habit. Full FDA jurisdiction under which tobacco is subject to the same standards of review as are applied to other regulated products is at the heart of any meaningful, comprehensive national approach to tobacco control. Adequately funded public health programs such as public education, smoking cessation, research and state and community-based programs are also critical as is a means of subjecting the industry to significant penalties if tobacco use among children does not drop substantially.

ACP-ASIM looks forward to working with your administration and the 106th Congress on this vital agenda.

Sincerely,

Harold C. Sox, MD
President