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## Religious Groups Call On Clinton To Support \$2.00 a Pack Tax

Fifteen religious groups, representing tens of millions of Americans, support a \$2.00 a pack tax on cigarettes. They include major Catholic organizations, mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations, and the largest Muslim organization in the United States (see box).

This Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health has notified President and Mrs. Clinton in a letter that "We believe increased taxes on tobacco is not just wise policy, but a moral obligation." Why? Because, "this Administration, has a rare opportunity to serve the American public." The letter concludes with a call that the President and First Lady act "according to the dictates of both reason and conscience. We appeal to you to act now in a way that will lead following generations to rise up and call you blessed."

The Interreligious Coalition supports such a tax as a way of challenging the tobacco companies' exploitation of some of the most vulnerable members of our society--the young and the poor. The \$20-30 billion a year raised by a \$2.00 @ pack tax would reduce the number of children and teenagers starting to smoke--90% of all new smokers are under 20 years of age, 50% are under 15 and an astounding 25% are under 12 years of age!

Simultaneously, the Coalition reminded the President and First Lady, a \$2.00 a pack tax would raise \$20-30 billion a year, permitting extension of health care to more people who are not now covered by health care insurance.

The Interreligious Coalition made it

clear that their fundamental reason for supporting such a tax was the moral obligation of all religions to save human lives.

The American Cancer Society, and the Heart and Lung Associations, using past experience in Canada, New Zealand and other countries, estimate that, over time, a \$2.00 a pack tax on tobacco would save two million preventable deaths.

### Public Overwhelmingly Supports Tobacco Tax

Widespread public support for a \$2.00 a pack tax was documented at a September 6 press conference at the National Press Club, featuring the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health, and attended, by among others, ABC, CNN, and NBC TV news. A poll commissioned by the American Cancer Society of over 1443 voters nationwide (a sample equivalent to presidential campaign polls) showed that two-thirds of all voters (66%) support a \$2.00 @ pack tax on cigarettes.

Support comes from all segments of American voters: Democrats (66%) and Republicans (63%); liberals (64%); African-Americans (64%), Hispanics (71%) and whites (66%). Even voters in leading tobacco-producing states were as strong (65%) as the rest of the country in supporting the \$2.00 a pack tax!

This poll, conducted April 23-24, demonstrates to the Administration and Congress that a \$2.00 tax on tobacco is that greatest of rarities—a tax that receives not

only broad, but deep support. Even after voters were presented with nine different anti-tax arguments, 63% repeated their support for a \$2.00 a pack tax, showing a firmness of resolve that, a representative of the polling company told the press conference, was unheard of in political polling. He said this kind of support will not decline but grow as the issue is debated.

Jerald Scott, Director of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, representing the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health, was one of three featured speakers at the press conference emphasizing widespread national support for the \$2.00 tax. The Interreligious Coalition represents religious organizations--Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim--with tens of millions of members in the United States. Other speakers included Blake Cady, professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School, and Jane Delgado, President and CEO of the National Coalition of Hispanic Health & Human Services Organizations.

### Honor Roll

Religious organizations, representing tens of millions of members, endorsing a \$2.00 a pack tax on cigarettes:

- The American Muslim Council
- Catholic Charities USA
- Christic Institute
- Church of the Brethren
  - The Rev. Dr. Donald E. Miller
- Congress of National Black Churches
  - Rev. H. Michael Lemmons, Exec. Dir.
- Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Interhealth/American Protestant Hospital Association
- National Association of Evangelicals
  - Robert P. Dugan, Jr., Director, Office of Public Affairs
- NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
  - Washington Office
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
  - General Conference
- United Church of Christ
  - Office for Church in Society
- United Methodist Church
  - General Board of Church and Society
- The Washington Institute
- YMCA
  - Metropolitan Washington
- YWCA U.S.A.

# Clinton Appoints Tobacco-Related Lawyers To His Cabinet

The Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health submitted testimony to the Senate Finance Committee raising questions concerning the confirmation of Mickey Kantor as U.S. Trade Representative. Under presidents Reagan and Carter that office had made cigarettes among the first U.S. products to overcome overseas trade barriers.

Kantor is one of several lawyers in the Clinton Administration who enters government directly from law firms retained by tobacco interests; tobacco interests which gave \$878,000 in "soft" contributions to the Democratic National Committee.

Ron Brown, Secretary of Commerce, belonged to a law firm that represented the Smokeless Tobacco Council and the Brooke Group Ltd., a company that includes tobacco interests.

Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education, comes to Washington from a South Carolina law firm that lobbies for Philip Morris Co. in that state.

Jack Quinn, Counsel to Vice-President Gore, Jr., enters government from Arnold & Porter, a Washington law firm also retained by Philip Morris Co.

Tobacco control groups were concerned about Kantor because Philip Morris International, one of the world's two largest cigarette exporting companies based in the United States, presently retains the law firm to which Kantor has belonged. Furthermore, Kantor himself was retained in 1987 and 1990 by restaurant associations in Southern California to fight city ordinances creating smoke-free environments.

During inauguration week (January 19), the Interreligious Coalition specifically asked Kantor to pledge "that he and his office will not help tobacco companies to undermine or gain exceptions to other country's health regulations and laws governing tobacco."

The statement concluded by saying, "We call on Mr. Kantor to stop collaborating with tobacco executives who knowingly and systematically massacre the innocent. We appeal to Mr. Kantor to become, instead, a righteous friend of the children of the world."

In the hearings Sen Bill Bradley (D-NJ), asked Kantor if he thought pressuring other countries to lower their health and advertising standards so American compa-

nies could sell cigarettes, would come to an end in his administration. "Yes, I do," Kantor answered. "I think these regulations or laws are scientifically based," and, he reassured the Senate Finance Committee, that "we should not be in the business of trying to override those in some negotiation and trying to push tobacco products."

## AMA Welcomes Religious Coalition To Tobacco Summit

Religious groups attending the tobacco control summit, "Tobacco Use: An American Crisis," convened by the American Medical Association, January 9-12 in Washington, D.C., strongly supported passage of a \$2.00 per pack federal tax and \$1.00 per pack state tax on cigarettes.

The summit conference drew over 200 representatives of groups from across the United States, as well as Canada and Europe. In addition to the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health, specific religious groups that were invited included the United Methodist Church, and the Washington Institute, a Seventh-day Adventist organization. Religious representatives helped draft statements produced by the key working groups on excise taxes and regulation of environmental tobacco smoke.

Plenary sessions recurrently referred to morality and religion, and the importance of the growing involvement in tobacco control of churches and synagogues. For example, Dr. Michael Eriksen, head of the federal government's office on tobacco control located at the Centers for Disease

Control, listed among some of the more encouraging recent developments in tobacco control, the increasing involvement of American churches.

## China Urged To Resist U.S. Tobacco Advertising

A representative of the Interreligious Coalition, Roy Benton, Professor of Mathematics at Pacific Union College, participated in the Third National Symposium on Smoking and Health convened by the People's Republic of China in Beijing Oct. 26-28, 1992.

Participants urged a formal ban on advertising of tobacco products. Currently, the Chinese tobacco monopolies do not advertise, but foreign countries are pressuring the government to allow their tobacco companies to advertise in China, particularly to women and children.

Conference participants took their action after learning that a U.S./People's Republic trade "understanding" would allow U.S. tobacco companies to sell and advertise in China. Now, foreign companies are not allowed to sell to the Chinese public. The conference appealed to foreign countries, such as the U.S., to reduce trade pressure on China to accept foreign cigarettes and advertising.

According to China's health officials, half of youth smokers begin before the age of 14. About 60 percent of adult males smoke; under 10 percent of females do, but the number is rising.

In Jan. 1992, a new "Tobacco Monopoly Law" banned smoking in schools and many public places, although it is clear that enforcement is lax. The symposium's working group urged a one cent per pack tax on cigarettes, to be allocated to health education on smoking, and a "spiral" anti-tobacco curriculum in elementary schools.

### THE INTERRELIGIOUS COALITION ON SMOKING OR HEALTH

Composed of organizations from all faith traditions, the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking OR Health is committed to educating religious communities and the wider public on policy initiatives to control tobacco. The focus is on federal and state policies in both the executive and legislative branches of government.

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