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## Tobacco workers march to protest Clinton plan to hike cigarette tax

WASHINGTON — About 16,000 tobacco-industry workers marched down Pennsylvania Avenue on Wednesday to protest a Clinton administration proposal to increase the federal cigarette tax to help pay for health-care reform.

After marching from the White House to the Capitol, the protesters visited federal office buildings to make personal appeals to members of Congress.

"We may need to do something about health care, but we don't need to do it on the backs of the people who have grown tobacco all their lives," Sen. Leach Faircloth, R-N.C., told the crowd.

Tobacco executives, workers, growers and suppliers say that if President Clinton's proposal to raise the cigarette tax by 75 cents a pack is approved, the higher levy will depress sales, costing the industry as many as 275,000 jobs.

Clinton has proposed raising the federal excise tax on cigarettes to 99 cents a pack from 24 cents to help finance his health-care-reform plan.

Most of the protesters were workers from the nation's two largest cigarette makers, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. of Winston-Salem, N.C., and Philip Morris of Richmond, Va. But others traveled to Washington by bus from as far away as Kentucky, South Carolina and Georgia.

## Menendez-murder lawyer bows out of case

LOS ANGELES — A judge on Wednesday refused to grant lawyer Leslie Abramson tax money to defend Erik Menendez at a second murder trial, declaring that it was not his concern if she took on a client who says he has run out of money.

Abramson, who became a national celebrity for her aggressive style at the first trial of Erik, 23, and Lyle Menendez, 26, which ended in hung juries after six months, immediately told Judge Cecil Mills of Los Angeles County Superior Court that she would ask to be removed from the case.

The brothers were charged in the Aug. 20, 1989, shotgun slaying of their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez.

## Colombian guilty in slaying of anti-drug editor

NEW YORK — A young man from Colombia was convicted Wednesday in the contract killing of a crusading anti-drug journalist who was gunned down on what authorities said were orders from a drug lord.

Wilson Alejandro Mejia-Velez, 19, was convicted of violating federal interstate-commerce laws in a murder-for-hire plot that involved telephone calls between Colombia and the United States.

Mannel de Dios Unzué, 48, the former editor in chief of *El Diario-La Prensa*, a New York-based Spanish-language daily, was sitting at a bar on March 11, 1992, when a shot him twice.

Prosecutors said Mejia-Velez carried out the hit on orders of Colombia's Cali drug cartel to silence de Dios' attacks on the cartel.

Mejia-Velez could face a life term.

Compiled from reports by The Associated Press and the Los Angeles Times.

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