

Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union

10401 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, KENSINGTON, MARYLAND 20895-3961
TELEPHONE (301) 933-8600 FAX (301) 946-8452

FRANK HURT
INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

August 4, 1997

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

Thank you for your letter of July 23 regarding S. 1009, "The American Family Fair Minimum Wage Act of 1997." On behalf of the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union, I want to pledge our full support for this important legislation.

The BC&T International, our local unions and membership worked extremely hard during the congressional battle last year to pass minimum wage legislation. We will once again rally our troops in support of S. 1009 because we believe it is in the best interest of all working men and women to establish a base wage for this nation that is a living wage.

An increase in the minimum wage, as called for in S. 1009, will strengthen the purchasing power of millions of American workers. In turn, new jobs will be created and the standard of living of working families across the nation will be improved. We look forward to joining you and other Senators who share this commitment to American workers.

It is in this spirit of serving American workers that I want to take this opportunity to outline for you the reasons why the BC&T has strongly opposed the proposal you and Senator Hatch put forth that would have more than doubled the federal cigarette excise tax to fund children's health care initiatives. While our Union has steadfastly supported the goal of providing greater health care coverage for needy children, we believe your approach is seriously flawed.

First and foremost, our International Union represents nearly 15,000 men and women employed in the domestic cigarette manufacturing industry. Enactment of the tax you and Senator Hatch propose would devastate these jobs and the lives of our members.

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Because of the excellent wages and benefits they earn, our tobacco industry members are an economic linchpin not only in cities such as Louisville, KY, Richmond, VA, Macon, GA, and Concord, Greensboro, Reidsville and Durham, NC, but for the entire southeast region of the country.

In addition to their substantial economic contribution, the BC&T's tobacco industry membership and local unions are a vital part of the region's labor movement. As such, they are at the forefront of progressive causes such as worker and civil rights, workplace safety and health and social justice. Wiping out their jobs would have an enormously adverse economic and social impact on the region.

Beyond the fact that your approach jeopardizes the livelihoods of our members, we also believe it is a mistake to fund an important public policy initiative such as this with a regressive, unstable and declining source of revenue.

An enormous increase in the cigarette tax, such as you have proposed, coupled with the ongoing national campaign by the Administration and other entities to decrease the public's cigarette consumption, would, if successful, starve the program of requisite funding. In the end, if cigarette consumption continues at current levels, the burden of the tax will fall on working class Americans.

Funding for important government programs such as expanding health care coverage for needy children should be realized through revenue sources which are progressive, equitable, stable and do not destroy the jobs of thousands of American workers.

We look forward to working with you in the fight to pass "The American Family Fair Minimum Wage Act" and on other issues of concern to working families. We also appreciate your consideration of our position on the excise tax issue which has such profound consequences for our members.

Sincerely,



Frank Hurt
International President

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