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"Cigarette taxes have an enormous potential to rapidly and significantly reduce smoking among teenagers and adults. For example, a \$2 per pack tax increase, maintained in real terms, would prevent roughly 2 million premature deaths over time by discouraging young people from beginning to smoke and encouraging some current smokers to quit. That is a saving of a greater number of lives than American losses from all wars combined."

Coalition on Smoking OR Health, "Saving Lives and Raising Revenue: The Case for Major Increases in State and Federal Tobacco Taxes," January, 1993, p. 2

Smoking Control Advocacy Resource Center (SCARC)

ACTION ALERT

January 29, 1993

Issue: Action Needed Now to Urge Major Increase in Federal Tobacco Tax¹

Summary

The Clinton Administration is seriously considering a significant increase in the federal excise tax on cigarettes as part of the economic plan the President will unveil before a joint session of Congress on February 17. The tobacco industry is lobbying furiously to minimize the tax increase or avoid it entirely. Industry tactics are likely to include direct lobbying and grassroots mobilization through telephone banks using 800-numbers, post-card campaigns and letter-writing campaigns.

Inclusion of a major tobacco tax increase in the President's economic plan is of critical importance, as many leading Democrats in Congress will follow Clinton's lead on this issue.

It is crucial that health groups and individuals remind the Administration and Congress now that the American people support higher tobacco taxes. Key points to be made by phone, fax, mail and, where possible, in personal meetings, include the following:

- * That you and your organization strongly support a major tobacco tax increase of at least \$2 per pack.

¹ This Alert was developed in cooperation with the Coalition on Smoking OR Health, which has provided the enclosed copy of its paper entitled "Saving Lives and Raising Revenue: The Case for Major Increases in State and Federal Tobacco Taxes."

- * That a major increase in tobacco taxes is an effective deterrent to youth smoking, and will save hundreds of thousands -- perhaps millions -- of lives over time.
- * That 76 percent of the American people favor increases in cigarette and alcohol taxes.
- * That tobacco taxes can raise very substantial new federal revenue to pay for national priorities such as health care reform.
- * That you expect the Clinton Administration to stand up to the tobacco industry on this issue.

See the attached sample letter for more letter-writing ideas.

Suggested Actions

1. Phone, fax or write to President Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton and key Cabinet members. Also urge members of the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means committees (especially those from your state) to support a major increase in tobacco taxes. Letters to other Members of Congress also may be useful. See the attached list of names and addresses.
2. Encourage like-minded advocates and organizations to write similar letters. Circulate this Alert!
3. Urge the editors of your local newspaper to write an editorial in support of higher tobacco taxes. Offer to brief the editorial board.
4. Write letters to the editor of local and regional newspapers.
5. Consider how your organization can draw attention to this issue over the next several weeks.
6. Please send copies of all correspondence on this issue (especially responses from Congress and the Administration) to the Coalition on Smoking OR Health, 1150 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 820, Washington, DC 20036; fax: 202-452-1417.
7. Please let the Coalition know how you and your organization would like to participate in a national campaign for higher tobacco taxes. Call Joy Epstein, the Coalition's Administrator for Federal Issues, at 202-452-1184.
8. Refer to the Coalition on Smoking OR Health's enclosed issue brief, "Saving Lives and Raising Revenue: The Case for Major Increases in State and Federal Tobacco Taxes" for background information. For useful quotes and facts on excise tax issues, please refer to the Advocacy Institute's Action Alert dated 11/8/92 ("Massachusetts Passes 25 Cent Cigarette Tax Increase Modeled on Prop. 99").

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of _____, I write to express our support for a major cigarette tax increase of at least \$2 per pack as a crucial step our nation should take to protect our children from addiction to tobacco and to lower health care costs.

Strong support for this measure already exists among the American people, including many smokers. This support will only grow if your Administration forcefully articulates the health rationale for taking this step.

The health benefits of higher tobacco taxes are not theoretical, they are proven. Every other major industrialized nation, including Canada, taxes tobacco at a much higher level than does the United States. Canada has reduced tobacco use among youth by two-thirds since 1980, primarily through tobacco tax increases.

The American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and the American Lung Association have estimated that a \$2 per pack tax increase, maintained in real terms, would raise about \$35 billion dollars per year and would save about 2 million American lives over time. Surely there can be no better way to raise revenue in this time of need than to impose a tax that will protect our children, improve our economy and save countless lives.

We trust that in you the American people have found a leader who will stand up to the tobacco lobby and take this long overdue step.

Very truly yours,

In addition to revising the text above as appropriate for different officeholders, letter-writers may wish to add additional points. For example:

- * Letters from organizations or individuals who represent low or middle income citizens, minorities, consumers, smokers, physicians, etc., should make special note of that fact. It is critical for policymakers to understand that the substantial benefits to poor communities of higher tobacco taxes (reduced health care costs, improved health, lower smoking rates, etc.) outweigh concerns about higher cigarette prices and tax regressivity.
- * Writers who have lost loved ones to tobacco may wish to share their loss and emphasize the human toll of smoking.
- * Individuals and groups may wish to suggest that tobacco tax revenue could be used for health care access, rebuilding America's inner cities, tobacco control, assisting tobacco farmers and tobacco state economies in the transition to healthier products, or other priorities.

- * Organizations that favor higher taxes on alcoholic beverages should voice support for those taxes as well.

The most important point is that every letter counts, and that the exact wording of each letter is of little importance provided the basic points are covered.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR KEY OFFICIALS:

1. CLINTON ADMINISTRATION

President Bill Clinton [Dear Mr. President]
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20500
Phone: 202-456-1414

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton [Dear Mrs. Clinton]
[Same address and telephone as the President]

Hon. Donna E. Shalala, Secretary [Dear Ms. Secretary]
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20201
Phone: 202-245-7000
Fax: 202-472-7054

Hon. Leon E. Panetta, Director [Dear Mr. Panetta]
Office of Management and Budget
Old Executive Office Building
17th St. & Pennsylvania Ave., N.W. 20503
Washington, D.C., 20503
Phone: 202-395-4840
Fax: 202-395-3746

Hon. Lloyd Bentsen, Secretary [Dear Mr. Secretary]
Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20220
Phone: 202-566-2533
Fax: 202-435-3807

2. MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

House and Senate switchboard (to reach all Members' offices): 202-224-3121

Address for Senate Members:

The Hon. _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Address for House Members:

The Hon. _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Members of the Senate Finance Committee

Democrats: Daniel P. Moynihan (NY), Max S. Baucus (MT), David L. Boren (OK), Bill Bradley (NJ), George J. Mitchell (ME), David H. Pryor (AR), Donald W. Riegle Jr. (MI), John D. Rockefeller (WV), Thomas A. Daschle (SD), John B. Breaux (LA), Kent Conrad (ND)

Republicans: Bob Packwood (OR), Robert J. Dole (KS), William V. Roth Jr. (DE), John C. Danforth (MO), John H. Chafee (RI), David Durenberger (MN), Charles E. Grassley (IA), Orrin G. Hatch (UT), Malcolm Wallop (WY)

Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

Democrats: Sam M. Gibbons (FL), J.J. Pickle (TX), Charles B. Rangel (NY), Fortney Pete Stark (CA), Andy Jacobs, Jr. (IN), Harold E. Ford (TN), Robert T. Matsui (CA), Barbara B. Kennelly (CT), William J. Coyne (PA), Michael A. Andrews (TX), Sander M. Levin (MI), Benjamin L. Cardin (MD), Jim McDermott (WA), Gerald D. Kleczka (WI), John Lewis (GA), L.F. Payne (VA), Richard E. Neal (MA), Peter Hoagland (NE), Michael R. McNulty (NY), Mike Kopetski (OR), William J. Jefferson (LA), Bill Brewster (OK), Mel Reynolds (IL)

Republicans: Bill Archer (TX), Philip M. Crane (IL), Bill Gradison (OH), Bill Thomas (CA), E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (FL), Don Sundquist (TN), Nancy L. Johnson (CT), Jim Bunning (KY), Fred Grandy (IA), Amo Houghton (NY), Wally Herger (CA), Jim McCrery (LA), Mel Hancock (MO), Rick Santorum (PA)