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# Fighting the Good Fight: The Citizen's Campaign Against Tobacco

by Matthew L. Myers

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Every day 1,000 Americans die from cigarette smoking. This is equivalent to the death toll of three jumbo jet crashes every day, year after year. Nevertheless, the federal government continues to subsidize the tobacco industry; every year it spends substantially more to support the growth of tobacco than to educate Americans about the hazards of smoking. In fact, in 1984 a congressional committee reported that three private voluntary health organizations—the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and the American Cancer Society—do more to educate the public about the health hazards of smoking than does the federal government. If religious groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists, coordinated a more active campaign against tobacco's grip on society, they could effectively limit the num-

ber of deaths caused by tobacco. However, they will face powerful opponents.

Conflicting political interests are one reason for the lack of serious action by the federal government. Polio did not have defenders who organized political action committees. There were no votes to be gained by supporting the continuation of smallpox. Cholera did not generate legions of lobbyists or trade associations in its defense, and no one ever ran a full-page ad encouraging the American public to get typhoid fever or downplaying the health risk of tuberculosis. Yet, although tobacco has killed more Americans than all of the diseases mentioned, the American tobacco industry has done and continues to do all of these things as part of its normal business practices.

Cigarette companies currently spend more than \$2 billion a year promoting their product.<sup>1</sup> On a daily basis we are exposed to cigarette ads that associate smoking with beautiful women; rugged men; and sexual, social, athletic and financial success. Cigarette firms sponsor tennis tournaments, rock concerts and soccer teams in their effort to promote their product. They pass out free samples of cigarettes and regularly thwart the TV advertising ban by their careful placement of stadium billboards during televised sporting events.

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The advertising efforts of these companies are not limited to adults. A document prepared by an ad agency for the Brown & Williamson cigarette company in the mid-1970s devoted an entire chapter to how young individuals can be introduced to Viceroy's. It states that attempts to reach young smokers should "present the cigarette as one of a few initiations into the adult world," and should "present the cigarette as part of the illicit pleasure category of products and activities."<sup>2</sup> A major investigative series in the Louisville, Kentucky, *Courier-Journal* in 1983 found evidence "that American teenagers are being targeted for the smoking habit." The article went on to quote a cigarette company executive:

Nobody is stupid enough to put it in writing, or even in words, but there is always the presumption that your marketing approach should contain some element of market expansion, and market expansion in this industry means two things—kids and women.

On most issues the news media acts as a watchdog for the American consumer and a prime catalyst for government action. However, the news media has had little to say about the magnitude of the smoking problem. The reason is simple: money. In 1980 the daily press carried more stories on the causes of influenza, polio and tubercu-

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**Cigarette manufacturers dominate newspaper, magazine and billboard advertising, leading the news media to pursue the smoking story far less aggressively.**

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losis than on the cause of one of every five American deaths: tobacco.<sup>3</sup> Cigarette manufacturers dominate newspaper, magazine and billboard advertising.<sup>4</sup> Without having to overtly demand censorship, the

tobacco industry's advertising dollar has led the news media to pursue the smoking story far less aggressively than one would otherwise expect.

Those wishing to become involved need not despair, however. The relative balance of political power is changing. In 1964 more than 50 percent of all adult Americans smoked. Today, fewer than one of every

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three Americans smokes.<sup>5</sup> Non-smokers outnumber smokers in every state of the union, and in all but five states they outnumber smokers by more than two to one. Equally as important, for the first time in history the tobacco lobby is facing organized, persistent, professional opposition. In 1982 the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association formed the Coalition on Smoking OR Health for the explicit purpose of combining forces to bring smoking and health-related issues more effectively and prominently to the attention of legislators. In 1982 Congress enacted the first increase in the federal excise tax on cigarettes in 31 years. In the same year Congress dramatically restructured the tobacco price-support program, shifting a much greater percentage of the cost of the program from the American taxpayer to tobacco growers. Most significantly, in October 1984 Congress enacted the Comprehensive Smoking Education Act, which, beginning in October 1985, replaced the health warning on cigarette ads and packages with four more specific, informative warnings that

now appear in a larger, bolder type and format. The act also requires cigarette companies to disclose to the federal government a complete list of all chemicals and other ingredients added to cigarettes during manufacturing and creates a statutory mandate for a federal office to coordinate and oversee the government's smoking education and research efforts.

Despite the fact that cigarette smoking remains this country's number one preventable cause of death, many thought that with the 1984 passage of the Comprehensive Smoking Education Act the problems posed by cigarette smoking would receive little public attention and even less legislative attention in 1985 and 1986. They were wrong. Never have tobacco-related issues received more attention than in 1985, and many of the actions initiated in 1985 remain on the legislative agenda for 1986.

Four tobacco issues raised in 1985 will top Congress' legislative agenda in 1986. They include cigarette excise taxes, chewing tobacco and snuff, protection of non-smokers in federal buildings, and cigarette advertising and promotion.

## Cigarette Excise Taxes

Changes in the federal cigarette excise tax have the greatest impact on the smoking habits of teenagers. Recent studies show that a 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes could decrease consumption among young smokers by close to 14 percent. These studies also indicate that tax increases complement other efforts to prevent teenagers from beginning a smoking habit.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that when the cigarette excise tax was increased in 1982 for the first time since 1951, cigarette consumption in this country took its biggest drop in years.

The federal government has underutilized excise taxes on cigarettes as a deterrent to those considering whether to smoke and as a mechanism to pay for the cost that cigarette smoking imposes on our society. In September 1985 the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment estimated that cigarette smoking costs approximately \$65 billion a year in lost productivity and health-care expenses.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, even when

## Cigarette Loopholes in Federal Legislation

Close to 20 years ago the late Luther Terry, then surgeon general of the United States, said:

There is no longer any doubt that cigarette smoking is a direct threat to a user's health. There was a time when we spoke of the smoking and health controversy. To my mind the days of argument are over.

Nonetheless, the federal government has treated tobacco more favorably than substances that have been found to cause cancer only in laboratory animals. In 1965 Congress placed a health warning on cigarette packages so weak that the *New York Times* described the legislation as "a shocking piece of special interest legislation." Five years later when Congress prohibited all cigarette advertisements from TV and radio, it did so at the request of the tobacco industry; two years earlier the Federal Communications Commission had ordered TV networks to broadcast free anti-smoking public service

announcements to counter paid cigarette advertisements so long as the paid cigarette ads continued to appear.

In the early 1960s Congress gave the Food and Drug Administration the authority to ban all products that cause cancer in laboratory animals. However, this law does not apply to cigarettes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission guards against all unsafe or hazardous consumer products. Cigarettes are explicitly exempted from its jurisdiction. The Toxic Substances Act is designed to prevent human exposure to chemicals found to cause cancer. Not only are cigarettes excluded from its reach, but also—until the passage of the Comprehensive Smoking Education Act in the fall of 1984—cigarette manufacturers were not required to disclose to the federal government what chemicals they add to cigarettes during the manufacturing process.

Congress finally increased the excise tax from eight to 16 cents per pack in 1982, it did so for only three years.

In early 1985 more than 40 national organizations, including the Adventist Health Network, joined together to ask Congress to make permanent the 1982 tax increase and to consider raising the tax to 32 cents, the level at which it would have been had it been increased for inflation since 1951. Both houses of Congress have passed bills that would permanently preserve the 16 cent tax as part of the budget reconciliation process.

Members of the health community have announced their intention to ask Congress to raise the tax to 32 cents in 1986 as a mech-

raise the national excise tax on tobacco should write to Sens. Robert Dole (Senate majority leader) and Robert Packwood (chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance), as well as their own senators. In the House of Representatives, they should write to Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means), as well as their own representatives. (For senators, the address is: The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_, Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510. For members of the House of Representatives, the address is: The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_, House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515.)

## Smokeless Tobacco

**When the cigarette excise tax was increased in 1982 for the first time since 1951, cigarette consumption in this country took its biggest drop in years.**

anism for reducing the federal deficit and as an important preventive health measure. The proposals to increase the tax in 1986 will first be considered by the Senate Finance Committee chaired by Robert Packwood of Oregon and the House Ways and Means Committee chaired by Dan Rostenkowski of Illinois.

Readers who want to help maintain or

Until the mid-1970s the use of chewing tobacco and snuff was confined to a small percentage of the United States population located mainly in a few pockets in the South. However, study after study confirms that the use of smokeless tobacco, as chewing tobacco and snuff are called, has increased dramatically among young people during the past five years. In Louisiana, 20 percent of white males between the ages of eight and 17 polled in one study admitted to using smokeless tobacco. More than 25 percent of male high school students in a Colorado study were found to use chewing tobacco. In Texas, 9 percent of the students polled in 17 school districts used smokeless tobacco. Of these, 55 percent started at or before age 12 and 88 percent started at or before age 15.

### WIZARD OF ID

BY BRANT PARKER & JOHNNY HART



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In Eugene, Oregon, 19 percent of ninth-graders and 23 percent of 10th-graders questioned admitted that they used smokeless tobacco on a daily basis.<sup>8</sup>

This increase in popularity is no coincidence. Recently, smokeless tobacco manufacturers have undertaken an extensive campaign to promote their product to new users. Skillful television and magazine advertisements featuring entertainers and sports celebrities have sought to transform a habit previously considered unsociable to one viewed as attractive, fun, masculine and healthful, with a strong youthful appeal. Smokeless tobacco has been advertised during the Olympic games and other televised sporting events. Tobacco chewing clubs have been encouraged in high schools and tobacco spitting contests for children as young as the law will permit have been sponsored at local county fairs. As one smokeless tobacco executive is reported to have said, "Once a kid's hooked, he doesn't leave."

Smokeless tobacco has been directly linked to oral, pharyngeal and laryngeal cancer, gum disease and tooth loss. Like cigarettes, smokeless tobacco products contain nicotine, an addictive poisonous alkaloid.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, there are no restrictions on the advertisement of smokeless tobacco and no health warnings on its advertisements or packages. Bills are pending both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate to address these issues. In the House, H.R. 3510 is pending before the Energy Commerce Committee chaired by John Dingell of Michigan. This bill would require three

strong health warnings on all packages and advertisements of smokeless tobacco products, ban the advertising of smokeless tobacco products on radio and TV, and require an increase in the federal educational efforts on this issue.

Sens. Richard Lugar of Indiana and Orrin Hatch of Utah introduced S.1574 as a counterpart to the legislation pending in the House. S.1574 also contains three warnings, but differs in several respects. It does not contain a warning that the use of smokeless tobacco products is addictive, nor does it ban the advertising of smokeless tobacco products on TV and radio. S.1574 was approved by the Labor Human Resources

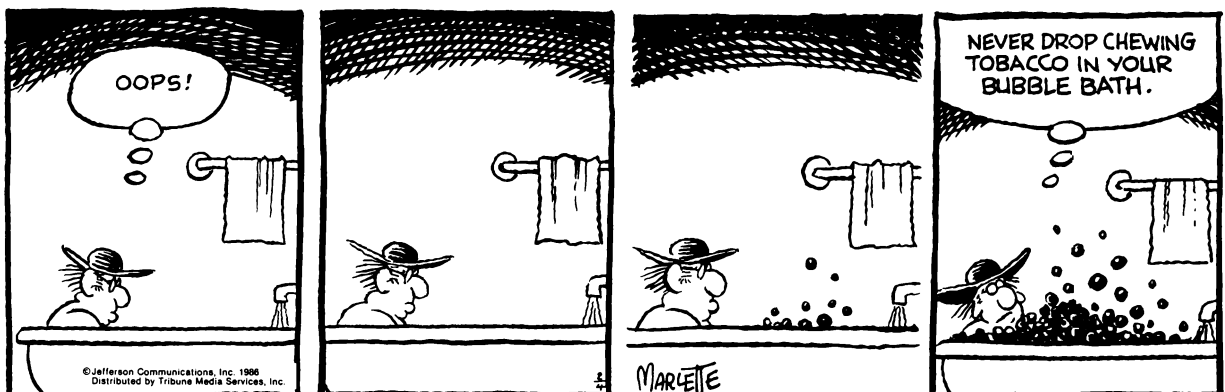
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**Smokeless tobacco has been directly linked to several types of cancer, gum disease and tooth loss. Yet there are no restrictions on its advertisement and no health warnings on its packages.**

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Committee in November 1985 and is now pending before the full Senate.

Those who want to influence legislation on smokeless tobacco should write to Sens. Orrin Hatch and Ted Kennedy on the Committee on Labor and Human Resources; Sens. John Danforth and Ernest Hollings on the Committee on Commerce, Science and



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Technology; and Reps. Henry Waxman, John Dingell and Mike Synar of the House Energy and Commerce Committee—as well as their own representatives and senators.

## *Clean Indoor Air*

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**T**hirty-seven states limit or restrict smoking in public places. Twenty-one restrict or ban smoking during public meetings or restrict smoking to certain areas within public buildings. However, until 1985 Congress had never seriously considered legislation to protect non-smokers in federal buildings. In July 1985, Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska introduced S.1440, "The Non-Smoker's Rights Act of 1985." This bill would limit smoking in federal buildings to specifically designated areas. At a hearing held on this legislation in September 1985, numerous witnesses testified to the ever-increasing scientific evidence of the health hazards of involuntary

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smoking on the non-smoker. Within the past year a study by the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that no fewer than 500 and possibly as many as 5,000 workers die each year from diseases related to secondhand smoke.<sup>10</sup>

On November 19, 1985, the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs voted in favor of S.1440, paving the way for its consideration by the full Senate,

Those particularly concerned about legis-

lation protecting non-smokers in federal buildings should write to Sens. Ted Stevens, William Roth and Thomas Eagleton—as well as their own representatives and senators.

## *Cigarette Advertising*

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**N**ever has the need for restricting abuses in cigarette advertising been greater than today. Cigarettes are this nation's most heavily advertised consumer product.<sup>11</sup> Traditional cigarette advertising abuses have been compounded by a promotional campaign initiated by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which falsely attempts to portray the smoking and health issue as a continuing scientific controversy. One particular R.J. Reynolds advertisement falsely calls the evidence that smoking causes heart disease speculative and deceptively implies that a recent study conducted by the National Institutes of Health requires a re-examination of this evidence. Nothing could be farther from the truth, but millions of Americans may be misled.

Advertising abuses such as these have led groups like the American Medical Association, the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association to call for significant prohibitions and restrictions on cigarette advertising. Members of the Coalition on Smoking OR Health have called for congressional oversight hearings on cigarette advertising and promotion in early 1986.

While there is no simple resolution to America's ongoing addiction to cigarettes, significant progress can be made if federal, state and local governments and the private sector make a long-term commitment to a comprehensive multi-faceted approach that is able to withstand the pressure of the tobacco lobby. Seventh-day Adventists can be of great help in this struggle. If the surgeon general's goal of a smoke-free society by the year 2000 is to be achieved, the time for action is now.

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