

LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

The President
September 9, 2001
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing on behalf of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT), an international professional association dedicated to fostering and disseminating research on tobacco and nicotine. We are very concerned about the positions being taken by the U.S. delegation in negotiations on the Framework Convention in Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCTC may be the most important international effort ever mounted to combat avoidable disease and death. The U.S. should be a leader in this effort. Instead, it is the principal impediment to progress.

According to SRNT members who are participating in the negotiations, the U.S. delegation is consistently taking positions contrary to the will of the substantial majority of international delegations and contrary to the interests of reducing tobacco-produced disease throughout the world. Furthermore, the positions taken by the U.S. delegation are weaker than the reality of tobacco control measures already in place in our own country. And the explanations offered for many of the U.S. positions are not defensible. For example, when the U.S. opposed a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion, it claimed to do so on grounds that such a ban would be unconstitutional in our country and in several others. A delegate to the negotiations proposed a compromise that would have covered this contingency, restating the provision as calling for a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion subject to the limits of national law. The U.S. delegation refused to accept this language. There were numerous additional instances that caused many participants to conclude that the U.S. positions are designed to placate cigarette manufacturing interests in the U.S.

The science on the threat posed by tobacco and the potential to control it is substantial and clear. Epidemiologists working with the World Health Organization project that tobacco will become the single leading cause of death worldwide early this century, with most of the burden falling on people living in developing countries. Half of tobacco-related deaths occur during middle age, peak years of productivity crucial to the development of the world's poorest nations. A variety of tobacco control measures, from taxation to protection of nonsmokers from environmental tobacco smoke, are demonstrably effective and even highly cost-effective. A leading practitioner of health care cost-effectiveness analysis has labeled smoking cessation "the gold standard of health care cost-effectiveness," and other researchers have observed that many environmental and policy tobacco control measures are even more cost-effective.

Mr. President, SRNT urges you to instruct the U.S. delegation to change its position to that consistent with the interests of improving global health and with the desires of the vast majority of delegates to the FCTC negotiations. The interests of global health should clearly dominate those of American tobacco interests.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Perkins, PhD,
SRNT President Chair,

John Hughes,
SRNT Policy Committee