



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**THE NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND,
NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN TOBACCO PREVENTION NETWORK AND
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN TOBACCO CONTROL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
JOIN LEGACY® IN URGING GROUPS TO RE-CONSIDER EVIDENCE IN
MENTHOL DEBATE**

WASHINGTON, DC -- As the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) weighs the evidence on the deadly impact of menthol cigarettes, three African American organizations have spoken out against a potential ban, urging the Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee to consider the negative implications of a ban and to discount any unsubstantiated evidence on menthol. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) and National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) have expressed concerns that evidence to support a ban is inconclusive and a dangerous “black market” for menthol products could develop due to the ban.

Legacy, who was an early proponent of a menthol ban, respectfully disagrees. We join the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN) and the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council (AATCLC) in a collective call to ban menthol as an additive in all tobacco products. We are advocating for a close review of the existing data that shows not just disproportionate marketing to and use of menthol products in African American populations but also a higher overall rate of tobacco use and lower quit rates (<http://www.thedefendersonline.com/2010/10/15/lorillard%E2%80%99s-orwellian-assertion-slavery-is-freedom/>).

An estimated 45,000 African Americans die annually due to tobacco related illness. A ban on menthol could result in major improvements in overall public health through lower youth and minority smoking rates and higher adult quit rates.

Legacy hopes that these groups reconsider their stance on this issue in light of the science.

“It is a national disgrace and a tragedy that these lethal menthol products have been allowed to be marketed so disproportionately to African-American youth – or to any youth for that matter,” said John Payton, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. “The FDA should help millions of Americans avoid tobacco-related death and disease by banning menthol flavoring in cigarettes.”

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"NAATPN raised the issue of menthol as a tobacco additive nearly three years ago, as the legislation was being developed to give authority to the FDA to regulate tobacco for the first time," said William S. Robinson, NAATPN's executive director. "We thought then, and still do now, that the exemption of menthol as a banned flavoring is wrong, discriminatory in its impact, and is a major factor in continuing the health-related disparities that currently exist. We join the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, AATCLC and Legacy in a collective voice to ban menthol as an additive in all tobacco products, and for the industry to turn over what they have known about menthol's property to the Scientific Oversight Committee as soon as possible."

"Between the 1960s and 80s the tobacco companies fought their competitive "menthol wars" in Black inner city neighborhoods, aggressively marketing their deadly products," said Carol McGruder, Co-Chair of AATCLC. "It is by no accident that 80 percent of African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. Menthol is not just a flavorant; it makes it easier for our youth to start smoking; it keeps people smoking; and it inhibits them from quitting. Menthol makes the poison go down easier. With so many other crucial issues facing our community, we are in a state of disbelief that some of our Black leadership organizations, such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC), and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE) continue to act as front groups for the predatory tobacco industry," she said.

Dr. Cheryl Heaton, President and CEO of Legacy agreed. "My hope is that these groups will reconsider their positions given the overwhelming evidence confirming that, for many decades, the tobacco industry has aggressively targeted the African American community in their advertising of menthol cigarettes - the direct result of which is that our nation is needlessly robbed of tens of thousands of Black lives every year," she said.

*Legacy is dedicated to building a world where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit. Located in Washington, D.C., the national public health organization helps American live longer, healthier lives. Legacy develops programs that address the health effects of tobacco use, especially among vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by the toll of tobacco, through grants, technical assistance and training, partnerships, youth activism, and counter-marketing and grassroots marketing campaigns. The foundation's programs include **truth**®, a national youth smoking prevention campaign that has been cited as having contributed to significant declines in youth smoking; **EX**®, an innovative public health program designed to speak to smokers in their own language and change the way they approach quitting; and research initiatives exploring the causes, consequences and approaches to reducing tobacco use. The American Legacy Foundation was created as a result of the November 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) reached between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. Visit <http://www.legacyforhealth.org/>.*

Legacy is equipped with a VideoLink ReadyCam™ television studio system, providing journalists with faster, easier access to the nation's leading tobacco prevention and cessation experts. From this in-house broadcast studio, Legacy can offer immediate access to its experts to comment on breaking news, new research publications, or any news related to youth smoking prevention, adult quit smoking programs, or any issue related to smoking. The studio is connected directly to the Vyvx fiber network and is always available for live or pre-taped interviews. To arrange an interview, please contact Julia Cartwright at 202-454-5596.

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