

April 5, 1991

TO: Tom C. Griscom

FROM: Tom L. Ogburn, Jr.

SUBJECT: Public Issues Update March 25 - April 5, 1991

Following are highlights of Public Issues activities for the period of March 25 - April 5, 1991.

Montana -- The Montana legislature has been considering several proposals for cigarette tax increases ranging from three to twenty-five cents per pack. Public Issues has been involved during the past six weeks. The RJR Volunteer Action Center conducted a phone bank into the districts of key senators, urging smokers to write their legislators, and smokers' rights groups conducted letter-writing campaigns. Also, a direct-connect phone bank operation was conducted into districts of key senators within the past ten days. A bill to provide a three cent per pack increase with the money going to the state's general fund was defeated this week in the Montana Senate by a vote of 37 to 10.

South Carolina -- As part of RJR's efforts on the proposed cigarette tax increase, a direct-connect phone bank and local Smokers' Rights Groups across the state contacted members of the Senate Finance Committee. The committee stripped the 5-cents per pack excise tax increase from the budget bill approved by House some three weeks ago. Budget reconciliation efforts will begin, but at this point Governor Campbell continues to stand behind his pledge of no new taxes.

Riverside, California -- City Council in Riverside voted Tuesday against considering a possible smoking ban in public places, workplaces, and restaurants. A coalition of restaurant owners and smokers successfully pressured council members as it did two weeks ago when a council committee considered the same anti-smoking proposals -- and also rejected them. A Volunteer Action Center phone bank, direct mail, and smokers' rights groups played an important part in this victory.

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Lafayette, Louisiana -- At the March 26 meeting of the Lafayette city council, a resolution was passed "encouraging" businesses and other establishments to enact smoking guidelines. Since the original proposal in Lafayette called for a total ban on smoking in some areas and mandatory restrictions in restaurants, other public places, and in private workplaces, the voluntary measure is viewed as a major success for the local smokers' rights group. In an interview with the local television station Councilman Al Simon, the sponsor of the mandatory restrictions, acknowledged that smokers in the community had called, written, and petitioned the city council to prevent his proposal from passing.

Walnut Creek, California -- When more than 300 local citizens showed up to attend the Walnut Creek City Council meeting this week as it considered what could be the most restrictive smoking ordinance in the country, the meeting had to be moved to a larger auditorium -- and the national media covered the event. The crowd was split 50/50 on the issue. The hearing also had to be continued until April 9 because so many citizens, including 39 smokers' rights activists, had yet to testify. Public Issues efforts included direct mail to key activists, establishing a smokers' rights group, and coalition building among restaurateurs, retailers, and members of business associations.

Maine -- In Maine, a joint state legislative committee heard testimony April 3 from citizens, supporting and opposing as many as seven proposed anti-smoking bills, including a ban in restaurants. Smokers, representing four of five smokers' rights groups in the state, testified against the bills. A Volunteer Action Center phone bank to smokers and local restaurants helped with turnout. The committee is expected to vote on bills next week. Early indications are that the committee may approve the anti-legislation, but it would die in the full legislature.

Nevada -- The Nevada legislature has had under consideration legislation to remove the state preemption provisions of their laws regulating public smoking. Testimony was heard last week in a Senate Committee, and no action was taken on the measure. Another work session was held today, April 4, and again no action was taken. Smokers' rights groups in Nevada have at the request of State Government Relations written Senators who sit on the Commerce Committee urging them to reject the bill, thus retaining preemption. A new bill has just been filed regarding the same issue and the committee is expected to consider both bills at yet another upcoming hearing.

Minnesota -- Major efforts continue to oppose Governor Carlson's request for a 24-cents per pack increase in the state excise tax. Working with RJR State Government Relations, 31 legislators were identified for constituent contacts on the proposed tax. On April 3, Public Issues began a direct-connect phone bank to smokers' rights activists in the 17 House districts and 14 Senate districts that were targeted. Over the next three weeks, these legislators will get calls in opposition to the tax increase. Local groups are redoubling their efforts to oppose the tax. Letters and phone calls continue, and groups are poised to make personal visits to five legislators who hold key leadership positions. Local groups in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area have also been active in opposing efforts to make the state's Clean Air Bill much more restrictive on smoking. Group members attended two senate committee hearings and testified against the proposal. This week, the proposed amendment was defeated by committee vote.

Leadership Training Seminars -- Since our last report, Public Issues held Leadership Training Seminars in Raleigh, NC and Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Forty individuals, representing ten smokers' rights groups, attended the meetings. The full-day session provides advanced training and information on ETS, media relations, coalition building, building a more effective local group, and combating workplace smoking restrictions. A seminar will be held this Saturday in Dallas, Texas.

CHOICE -- The May edition of CHOICE, covering workplace smoking issues, is about complete and will be printed/distributed later this month.

Smokers' Rights Groups Outside USA -- Two members from Infotab (one of which is on loan from the Japan monopoly) received a full briefing on Smokers' Rights organizational efforts by Public Issues. They will attend a Leadership Training Seminar and Smokers' Rights meeting over the weekend.

CHOICE Elicits Response -- During the past few days we have received several inquiries from Capital Hill. In response to the Take Action Today section of CHOICE, smokers have been calling Congressional offices to oppose restrictions on smoking in U.S. airports. Our article reported that Rep. Dick Durbin has announced he may push for federal legislation to ban smoking in all U.S. airports. Since there is not an official bill yet, Congressional staffs are calling to acquire the appropriate background information.

Tom L. Ogburn, Jr.