

March 22, 1991

TO: Tom C. Griscom

FROM: Tom L. Ogburn, Jr.

SUBJECT: Public Issues Weekly Update March 18 - 22, 1991

Following are highlights of Public Issues activities for the week of March 18 - 22, 1991.

Statesville, N.C. -- In less than 48 hours, a smokers' rights group leader here almost single-handedly defeated a City Council plan to place smoking restrictions on city workers. Upon returning from our Raleigh Leadership Training Seminar last Saturday, Jane Blalock learned about the city's proposed anti-smoking policy, alerted our Field Coordinator and began organizing a mini phone blitz of council members to protest the plan. Blalock and four other smokers then spoke out at Monday's public hearing and watched the council table the proposal indefinitely -- after being told earlier that the new policy "was a foregone conclusion."

Riverside, California -- A city council committee here has effectively killed a workplace and restaurant smoking ban proposal and provided us with a major victory. The committee rejected the bans and approved a motion calling for a two-year moratorium on similar proposals. Coalition partners, mainly restaurant owners and smokers, 40 in total, outnumbered the antis two-to-one. Some 3,000 petition signatures were presented and eight smokers testified. In the last three weeks, 13 smokers' letters to the editor have been printed. Riverside grassroots organizing as part of the Industry California Plan effort, along with an RJR employee phone bank, a mailing to activists and petition gathering by RJR Field Sales, helped spur this successful opposition to smoking bans at the Monday afternoon hearing.

Iowa -- The Iowa House of Representatives late last week rejected Governor Branstad's plan to raise cigarette taxes 10 cents a pack. Phone banks, direct mail, and smokers' rights group activity helped defeat the tax hike proposal. Field Coordinator Tom Synhorst's contact in the state house overheard several members talking about the avalanche of mail they had received. Tom Joccum (D-Dubuque) said he had received more than 60 letters in one week.

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Dothan, Alabama -- Todd Watlington, leader of the local group in Dothan and an RJR salesman, notified us of an onerous smoking restriction ordinance that was to be considered by the Dothan city commission at 4:00 p.m. that same day. We worked with Todd to help him draft the testimony he wanted to deliver at the hearing and we encouraged him to get other members of the group to go with him. Todd and four others attended the hearing, where he spoke against the restrictions and delivered 2500 petition signatures to the commissioners. The proposal was tabled indefinitely. A motion was made by the commissioner who proposed the restrictions to bring the issue to a vote of the public, but the mayor spoke out against a referendum, and the motion died for lack of a second.

Lafayette, Louisiana -- On March 19, the Lafayette city council rejected a smoking restriction ordinance by a 7-0 vote. Local group members wrote and called the council members (these requests for action being made through a VAC phone bank), circulated petitions throughout the city, and wrote letters to the local newspaper. After the vote the city council instructed the city attorney to redraft the ordinance due to perceived technical problems and it will be reconsidered at the 3/26 meeting. The group leader also met with leaders of the ACLU, the Restaurant Association, the Chamber of Commerce and the NAACP. Members of the local group, and a representative of the group's coalition partners, attended the 3/19 meeting, and all will be back to do battle again on 3/26.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Restaurant Association (CMRA) Voluntary Smoking Policy Plan -- The Charlotte Observer restaurant editor wrote a favorable editorial on Friday, March 14. The editorial endorsed a voluntary plan to establish designated smoking areas as preferable to any government regulation. The CMRA will request city and county support for the plan over the next two weeks. Public Issues is working with State Government Relations and TI to utilize this approach as a model in other areas.

Lexington, KY Tobacco Growers Seminar -- Public Issues presented the Allied Forces and Smokers' Rights program to 190 tobacco growers and spouses from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio and West Virginia. Approximately 75% of the growers were either members of the program or became members at the meeting. Several indicated interest in beginning immediate involvement in groups or to address current issues.

CHOICE -- We have received over 51,000 requests to date for the TI youth smoking booklet featured in CHOICE 26. Mailing of CHOICE 27 is about complete; we received about 5,000 smokers' responses the first week to its various programs. Copy development for CHOICE 28, which will address workplace smoking issues, is well underway. It will be distributed in late April.

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South Carolina -- The proposed 5-cents per pack increase in the state excise tax, which was passed in the SC House last week, is now being considered in the Senate Finance Committee. On Saturday, March 16, we activated a direct-connect phone bank to enable smokers to voice their opposition to the tax increase to their representative on that committee. Committee members received calls at their homes on Saturday and at the capital on Monday. Groups throughout the state continue to write letters, make phone calls, and deliver petitions to their legislators. Working with the SC Association of Convenience Stores, Public Issues Field Coordinator Janet Hughes was able to get a full page write up on this issue in the March edition of the SCACS newsletter, "Pulse," which goes to the 250 members of that association.

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