

18 MAR 1982



American Heart Association

WE'RE FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE

056841

March 18, 1982

The Honorable Edwin Meese, III
Counselor to the President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Meese:

The American Heart Association, its 119,000 scientific and non-medical leadership and more than two million volunteers are deeply concerned about the Administration's recent retreat from support for stronger and more specific warning labels on cigarette packages and advertisements.

In our view, at the very minimum the federal government should provide Americans -- particularly children and young persons -- with essential information on the well-established health hazards of a seriously dangerous product which Surgeon General Koop calls "the chief, single avoidable cause of death in our society."

We fail to understand why tobacco and tobacco products continue to enjoy special protections under federal health and safety laws. These products are known to produce toxins which cause, or contribute importantly to, some 340,000 deaths per year in the United States. They also cost our nation an estimated \$25 billion per year in lost productivity. No other such dangerous product is exempt by law from control under the Consumer Product Safety Act.

We share the President's desire that the voluntary sector more actively assist and supplement federal programs. We believe that the Comprehensive Smoking Prevention Education Act proposals (H.R. 5653 and S. 1929) are excellent examples of how these efforts can complement one another.

Neither the House nor the Senate bill is designed to prohibit individuals from smoking, as some opponents have sought to maintain. The cost to the cigarette industry to provide rotating warning labels is minimal compared to the huge potential in health dollars and in human lives.

As Robert Keeshan ("Captain Kangaroo") recently stated in testimony before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment: "We must reach pre-teens and teens with the life-saving message -- smoking can kill you! ... let's turn our greatest efforts to our children who have the most to gain and the longest to live."

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Mr. Edwin Meese, III
March 18, 1982

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In meetings of the American Heart Association with Secretary Schweiker, Assistant Secretary Brandt, Surgeon General Koop and Mr. Virginia Knauer in recent months, we were assured of Administration support for stronger rotational warnings that cite specific health hazards. As recently as March 5th Assistant Secretary Brandt cited such support by the Administration in testimony to the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment.

We are puzzled and shocked at the apparent sudden and complete reversal of support, particularly since it would seem to put the Administration in a position of opposing the very position it has consistently and formally taken on this issue.

We urge you to give serious consideration to the overriding health concerns involved and act to restore Administration support for strong, specific rotational warning labels on cigarette packages and advertisements. We are absolutely committed to support of these measures for smoking prevention education and hope that we will be working with you.

We need to give our children who are the American citizens of our future -- the greatest opportunity for good health and a long and fulfilled life.

Sincerely,



Donald C. Harrison, M.D.
President

DCH:hmh

cc: Secretary Richard S. Schweiker
Assistant Secretary Edward N. Brandt, Jr, M.D.
Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, M.D.
Mrs. Virginia Knauer, Office of Consumer Affairs