

NEWS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Tom Daschle and Nancy Pelosi

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DASCHLE, PELOSI SEND LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH ON TOBACCO CONTROL TREATY

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator Tom Daschle and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi on Friday sent a letter to President Bush calling on the United States to support a strong tobacco control treaty at the World Health Assembly next month. Senator Daschle and Congresswoman Pelosi expressed concern about attempts to weaken the draft treaty and asked the President not to reopen treaty negotiations.

“Tobacco-related deaths are a worldwide epidemic, and we stand today on the edge of an historic opportunity to curb that epidemic and end the senseless deaths of millions around the world,” Senator Daschle said. “A strong tobacco control treaty would make great strides toward that goal. The United States should be striving to make this treaty stronger not working to make it weaker. 5 million people die each year of tobacco-caused diseases, and if current trends continue, tobacco will kill 10 million people a year by 2020. We simply cannot afford to interfere in the success of a treaty that will help reduce that staggering figure.”

"The United States is the world's number one exporter of cigarettes -- U.S. companies supply nearly 6 trillion cigarettes, or one-fifth of all the cigarettes smoked around the world," Congresswoman Pelosi said. "That means we have a responsibility to also export the public health tools that are appropriate in our own country -- health warning labels, education campaigns, and limits on tobacco promotion. The Bush Administration must not impose the agenda of Big Tobacco companies on these negotiations. The "Marlboro Man" is not a suitable ambassador for the United States, yet he may be the most visible representative we are presenting to young people all over the world. We can and must set a better example."

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April 25, 2003

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our concerns about the positions taken by your Administration during negotiations on the World Health Organization's tobacco control treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). On March 1, the 171 member nations that took part in the negotiations reached agreement despite strong opposition from your Administration. Even though the FCTC provides an historic opportunity to tackle the worldwide tobacco epidemic and prevent the premature deaths of millions, the U.S. was among a very small number of nations that repeatedly sought to weaken it and the only nation that threatened to continue to try to weaken the treaty by reopening negotiations during the World Health Assembly in May. We urge that you not seek to reopen the negotiations because the only outcomes would be to isolate the U.S. from our allies and weaken the treaty so much so that it will not effectively deal with the harm posed by tobacco use.

You have made commendable statements about the consequences of tobacco use. You stated, "tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in America." You said you view tobacco as one of the greatest health issues facing our nation. And when speaking about the tobacco treaty, Secretary Thompson said the United States was fully committed to a "strong and dynamic" treaty to fight the "devastating health, economic and social consequences of worldwide tobacco consumption." Given these comments, we find the actions of your Administration in relation to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) inexplicable.

In contrast to these public statements, your Administration went to great lengths to weaken many important provisions of the treaty. In addition to advancing weak language, the U.S. delegation also inappropriately pressured other nations to adopt U.S. positions. A Thai delegate stated during the negotiations that the U.S. threatened to stop providing monetary and technical assistance to international tobacco control efforts if the treaty were not weakened. Your Administration also lobbied other nations to support its efforts to weaken the treaty. A U.S. communiqué to Saudi Arabia sent just before the last round of negotiations asks for Saudi support in weakening the tobacco treaty. The communiqué supported a provision that would have jeopardized the health provisions of the treaty by making them vulnerable to challenge as violations of international trade agreements.

The actions of your Administration isolate the U.S. by showing disregard for the clear interests of our friends. The wiser course of action is to join with the vast majority of nations in their fight against tobacco use. Allowing a strong treaty to go forward would certainly indicate our desire to protect the rest of the world from the death and disease caused by tobacco.

The toll that tobacco use takes around the world is growing at an alarming rate, with nearly five million people dying each year from tobacco-caused disease. The tobacco industry is expanding its reach to new areas and especially targeting women, children and others throughout the world. The United States should be a leader in the FCTC effort to protect public health. We urge that you not seek to reopen the negotiations and instead respect the views of the vast majority of nations and allow a strong tobacco treaty to move forward.

Sincerely,

Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader

Tom Daschle
Senate Democratic Leader