

May 12, 1998

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
U. S. Senate
315 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC

Dear Senator Kennedy:

I am writing to express my deep concern and opposition to the unprecedented and unfair tax on tobacco.

The McCain bill would impose over 500 billion dollars in new taxes on 47 million Americans who chose to smoke. The majority of smokers are lower to middle income people—those least able to afford it. Washington already makes more money from taxing cigarettes than cigarette companies do from selling them. Where is this money going?

Even more unbelievable is the argument that this financial tax windfall will keep kids from smoking. I always thought that parents, not Big Government, had responsibility for the proper upbringing of our youth.

Huge tax increases alone won't reduce youth smoking. According to data from the US Centers for Disease Control, 11 of the 13 states that raised tobacco taxes in the early 1990's saw an increase in youth smoking in the years that followed. In addition, President Clinton and Congress also fail to mention that 98 percent of cigarettes sold are smoked by those of legal age: only 2 percent are smoked by minors. The new tax proposals would tax 98 percent to try to influence 2 percent. Even more incredible, the new taxes would create a huge black market for cigarettes (which has already happened in Canada, where cigarette taxes had to be rescinded). Ironically, a black market makes cigarettes more accessible to our kids. Where is the logic here?

Massive taxes to discourage or prevent use of a legal product (is prohibition next?), no matter how potentially harmful, is a violation of our rights as American citizens. Which legal product will be next? Isn't it time we saved ourselves from Big Government?

I urge you to oppose this unfair and regressive tax. Lets find more effective ways to reduce youth smoking. I would appreciate hearing from you on the issues outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Muriel Smerdon

Muriel Smerdon
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cc: President William J. Clinton

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