

# TOBACCO NEWS FLASH

## Smoke-free News

### **-Surgeon General Nominee Would Make Tobacco a Priority**

President Bush's nominee for U.S. Surgeon General told Congress that smoking would be one of his three top priorities if confirmed and vowed to resign if he was asked to put politics before public health, the New York Times reported.

Nominee James W. Holsinger told the Senate health committee during a confirmation hearing that "making America a tobacco-free nation," childhood obesity, and improving public-health responses to emergencies would be his top priorities is his nomination is approved.

Following testimony by former Bush administration surgeon general Richard Carmona about political pressure on his office, Holsinger was asked repeatedly if he would be able to stand up to such pressure if confirmed.

"If I were faced with a situation that I felt I could not in good conscience do, I think I have a clear response to that. I would resign," Holsinger said.

### **-TV Campaign Gives Boost to Quit Line**

Calls to a national smoking quit line more than tripled when the phone number was publicized on TV in the wake of the cancer death of ABC News anchor Peter Jennings, Medical News Today reported.

ABC promoted the 1-800-QUIT NOW hotline during a series of World News Tonight stories titled, "Quit to Live: Fighting Lung Cancer." The number connected callers to state counselors who offered advice to smokers about quitting.

Hotline calls rose from 9,723 in October 2005 to 29,942 while the series ran, but

## **21st Century Could See a Billion Tobacco Victims**

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that a billion people worldwide could die from tobacco-related illnesses during this century, Reuters reported.

Douglas Bettcher, head of the WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative, said that tobacco "kills 5.4 million

people per year and half of those deaths are in developing countries. That's like one jumbo jet going down every hour."

Bettcher said that rising smoking rates in the developing world could lead to unprecedented death rates. He called on

governments to raise tobacco taxes, ban advertising, and enforce smoke-free workplace laws and indoor-smoking bans. "It's a completely preventable epidemic," Bettcher said. "If we do that, by 2050 we can save 200 million lives."

## **Nicotine Addiction Can Happen Quickly**

About one in ten youths who start smoking become addicted within a few days of taking their first puff, according to researchers who say that even a single cigarette can lead to addiction.

Scientists from the University of Massachusetts Medical School reported that 25 percent of young smokers get addicted to nicotine within a month, and even those who smoke just a few cigarettes monthly can suffer withdrawal symptoms when they don't

get their nicotine fix.

"Laboratory experiments confirm that nicotine alters the structure and function of the brain within a day of the very first dose. In humans, nicotine-induced alterations in the brain can trigger addiction with the first cigarette," said lead researcher Joseph R. DiFranza, M.D. "While smoking one cigarette will keep withdrawal symptoms away for less than an hour in longtime smokers, for novice

smokers that one cigarette suppresses withdrawal for weeks at a time."

"One dose of nicotine affects brain function long after the nicotine is gone from the body, he added. "The important lesson here is that youth have all the same symptoms of nicotine addiction as adults do, even though they may be smoking only a few cigarettes per month."

## **Plan Calls for 61-Cent Federal Tobacco Tax Increase**

Federal tobacco taxes would increase by 61 cents per pack to pay for a major expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) under a bipartisan deal in Congress, USA Today reported.

Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Finance Committee endorsed a plan to raise the federal tobacco tax from 39 cents per pack to \$1 to expand SCHIP to some of the more than 6 million children who are eligible for the program but currently have no coverage. The tax hike is expected to raise \$35 billion for SCHIP over the next five years.

"It really does come down to a choice between children and tobacco," said Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.). "This is a 'twofer'. It does decrease smoking, and it does connect public healthcare costs with one of the drivers of that cost, and that's tobacco."

A proposal in the House of Representatives would use a combination of tobacco taxes and lower Medicare payments to private insurers to add \$50 billion to SCHIP. However, President Bush has criticized some state expansions of SCHIP and could veto the

Driven proposal in Congress.

"The program is going beyond the initial intent of helping poor children. It's now aiming at encouraging more people to get on government health care," Bush said this week. "I'll resist Congress's attempt to federalize medicine."

The tobacco industry also opposed the plan. "We think that smokers are already paying enough," said Steve Kottak of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco.



