

Harm to Public Health in Favor of Tobacco Companies
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By Henry A. Waxman

I am extraordinarily disappointed with the tobacco principles put forth by Speaker Newt Gingrich. The Republican plan announced today is a sellout to the tobacco industry, pure and simple. It is a gift to the tobacco industry--and a disaster for children and public health.

To protect public health, it is absolutely essential that FDA have full regulatory authority over tobacco. Under current law, FDA has authority to prevent tobacco companies from targeting children. FDA also has authority to require tobacco companies to make safer tobacco products. Without these authorities, FDA can't do its job and protect the public.

The Gingrich proposal would strip FDA of most of this regulatory authority. The proposal to "define new, specific authority" for FDA is a code-word for barring FDA from issuing regulations to protect children or make tobacco products safer. It is an enormous step backward for public health and an enormous windfall for the tobacco industry.

On every other important score, the Gingrich proposal falls far short. Health experts say that tobacco price increases are essential to discourage teen smoking, but there are no price increases in this proposal. Health experts say that it is essential to establish enforceable, company-specific goals for reducing youth smoking, but there are no such goals in this legislation. Health experts say that there needs to be a national education campaign to discourage youth smoking, but there is no funding for such a campaign in this proposal.

There even appears to be a form of back-door liability protection for the tobacco industry in this proposal. The limitations on attorneys' fees are a not-so-subtle attempt to discourage attorneys from ever bringing tobacco cases. In every way, the Republican leadership's proposal is the polar opposite of the bipartisan Hansen-Meehan-Waxman bill that every public health group endorses and over 100 members have cosponsored.

Today is payback day for the tobacco industry. Philip Morris has been the single largest contributor to the Republican party for the last three years running. Since coming to power in 1995, the Republican party has received \$12 million from the tobacco industry. Today the industry is cashing in its IOUs.

Last July, Speaker Gingrich snuck a \$50 billion tax credit for the tobacco industry into the balanced budget legislation. This July, the Republican leadership will try to pass legislation that strips FDA of its regulatory authority over tobacco and does nothing meaningful to discourage teen smoking. Calling this proposal a public health measure is an extraordinarily cynical example of political doublespeak.

I call upon the Speaker to establish an open process for consideration of tobacco legislation. Let's bring both his tobacco-bailout proposal and the Hansen-Meehan bill before the Commerce Committee and the full House. Then the members and the American people can choose what kind of tobacco legislation they support.