



Faith United Against Tobacco



Testimony of

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Pensions

Hearing on
The Need for FDA Regulation of Tobacco Products

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Enzi, and Members of the Committee. I am Dr. Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. As you are aware, the Southern Baptist Convention is the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination, with more than 16 million members worshipping in nearly 44,000 autonomous local congregations, with a presence in 99 percent of the counties of the United States. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is the official Southern Baptist entity charged by the Southern Baptist Convention to speak to our nation's moral, cultural, and religious liberty issues.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in favor of S. 625, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, life-saving legislation to authorize the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate tobacco products. We have made enactment of the tobacco legislation introduced by Senators Kennedy and Cornyn and Representatives Waxman and Davis one of our top legislative priorities for the 110th Congress. This is an idea whose time has come, and, on behalf of most Southern Baptists, I strongly urge you to take action now and enact this important legislation.

I am also here as a representative of a broad-based coalition of faith leaders known as Faith United Against Tobacco. Since it was founded in 2002, Faith United Against Tobacco has grown to include over 20 national faith denominations and organizations. In addition to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, this coalition includes the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches in Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, the Seventh-day Adventists, the American Region of the World Sikh Council, and the Islamic Society of North America. Other broad-based groups, such as Church Women United and the Health Ministries Association, which represents thousands of faith community nurses across the country, have also joined Faith United Against Tobacco.

In addition to our national effort to convince Congress to enact the FDA regulation of tobacco legislation now before you, Faith United Against Tobacco has worked successfully across the country to enact tobacco control measures such as increased tobacco taxes, full funding of tobacco prevention programs, and smoke-free workplace legislation. In Indiana in 2005, for example, there was a very serious effort to dramatically cut funding for that state's landmark tobacco control program. A group of faith leaders, led by United Methodists, Southern Baptists, and faith community nurses, formed the Hoosier Faith and Health Coalition and took the lead in preventing these cuts from happening, which has saved many Hoosiers, particularly children, from tobacco addiction. Similar collaborations exist in other states, including Alabama, Kentucky, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. You can learn more about the history and accomplishments of Faith United Against Tobacco at www.faithunitedagainsttobacco.org.

Our focus at the federal level has always been on enacting legislation to give the FDA authority over tobacco products. Just yesterday, 24 national faith leaders from our coalition sent the attached letter to every Member of the U.S. Senate and House of

Representatives, urging support for the FDA legislation. As you can see, the signers of this letter represent very diverse groups, including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faith denominations, whose members include many tens of millions of Americans from every part of the country. I think it is also important to note that the 24 leaders who signed this letter are often on opposite sides of other very important social and political issues. But we are united in our desire to reduce smoking, especially among children, and in our commitment to the enactment of legislation authorizing the FDA to regulate tobacco products.

We all know the terrible statistics about the toll of tobacco on our families—over 400,000 Americans die every year from tobacco-caused illnesses; hundreds of thousands of others suffer every year from tobacco-caused illnesses such as lung cancer and heart disease; and every day over 1,000 of our children become addicted to this deadly product. For us in the faith community, these statistics are especially tragic because every day we must bury mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who die early from preventable deaths caused by tobacco addiction that, more often than not, began at a young age. We, then, are left with the task of trying to comfort their grieving survivors. I speak this morning from personal experience. I have sought not only to bring comfort to families and individuals, but to find comfort for my own loss.

I have too many relatives, particularly paternal uncles, who have had their lives tragically shortened by their addiction to nicotine. One uncle, who died in his late forties from lung disease, horribly exacerbated by smoking, still smoked even when reduced to carrying a portable oxygen supply with him wherever he went in his final months. He was literally a fire hazard to those around him. I am grateful that both my father and my mother, once heavy smokers, were able with much difficulty to break their tobacco habit in their late fifties. And thus, they are still with us at 84 and 82, respectively. If they had not quit smoking, they would both be long dead by now, a fact they readily acknowledge. They would have missed their five grandchildren's graduation from college, if not high school, and three of their grandchildren's weddings. Other children have not been as fortunate as I have been. They lost their parents prematurely to that ferocious killer, tobacco.

Millions of Americans have had their lives snuffed out before their time, often in their prime—at the peak of their careers, with a spouse and children at home, and with many other responsibilities and joys before them. The families of America must not continue to be lured toward futures of incomplete chapters. Men and women deserve to know the toxic chemicals rolled into every cigarette. Young sons and daughters deserve to enjoy their youth without being confronted with tobacco marketing tailored to their age.

Like the many Members of Congress from both parties and across the political spectrum who are cosponsoring this legislation, the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and the other faith groups in the coalition join America's public health community in viewing FDA regulation of tobacco as a critically needed tool to reduce tobacco use. This legislation would allow the FDA to prevent tobacco companies from adding ever more deadly and addictive ingredients; require larger and more informative health warnings; prohibit candy-flavored cigarettes; prevent tobacco sales to underage

children; and limit advertising and promotion of tobacco products that lure children into a deadly habit. Like many of you, we find it incredible that the FDA can ensure the safety of everyday items like cold medicines, cookies, and even dog food, but has no authority over tobacco, a product that causes more preventable deaths than any other.

Faith leaders are not asking for a ban on tobacco products or even that they be treated differently than other items. We are simply asking that tobacco products be subject to the same common-sense rules that apply to other products. We want to level the playing field. Why should manufacturers of cessation products that help people quit smoking be subject to FDA regulation but not the products that kill over 400,000 Americans every year? No one wants too much government regulation. What we are asking for is not overly burdensome; it would simply assure the protection of consumers, particularly our children. There is broad consensus in the faith community, both conservative and liberal, that this product must be regulated, and that is why we support this bill.

We also support this bill for moral reasons. My faith tradition informs me that our bodies are gifts from God and, therefore, should be treasured and treated with dignity. This means we should refrain from engaging in activities or abusing substances that pose grave threats to our health. Tobacco is one such substance. While each person bears responsibility for whether he or she chooses to engage in tobacco use, responsibility also falls upon those in authority, who have the power to end tobacco deception and significantly reduce the illness and death that it can produce. My faith tradition teaches me that it is morally wrong to know the good that should be done and not do it. I also believe that it is morally wrong to leave the most impressionable among us, our children, unprotected from the tobacco enticements that confront them. And so, I believe that those who are called to positions of leadership and power have a moral imperative to safeguard the men, women, and children of our country from falling into the pitfalls of tobacco abuse.

I find it unconscionable that Congress, knowing the deadly effects of tobacco use, continues to leave tobacco companies virtually unchecked, left to use their own discretion to determine what carcinogenic chemicals to include in their products. I find it unconscionable that Congress, knowing that the overwhelming majority of adult smokers began their habit as minors, would do nothing more than call unfortunate the tobacco companies' marketing targeted at children.

Almost 10 years ago, in 1998, Congress debated comprehensive tobacco control legislation but failed to enact anything. In 2004, the Senate overwhelmingly passed legislation virtually identical to S. 625, but it was killed in a conference committee. Throughout this time tobacco companies have continued to spend billions of dollars every year marketing their deadly products to children and, as a result, far too many high school students smoke and far too many people will die prematurely from tobacco-caused diseases.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and all other members of Faith United Against Tobacco believe that the United States Congress

must do a better job of protecting our children from tobacco addiction and the suffering of tobacco-caused illness and death. As political leaders, you have a moral obligation to act to protect our children and families. You have the means to curb the cycle of allurements and addiction, of disease and death, caused by tobacco. You owe it to the families of America to do so. We, therefore, urge you to act quickly to enact S. 625, bipartisan legislation to provide the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco products.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Enzi, and other Members of the Committee, I thank you for permitting me to testify this morning. I will be happy to entertain any questions.