

Testimony in support of HB 1024
from Dr. Eric Johnson
North Dakota Tobacco Prevention and Control Advisory and Executive Committees
To House Appropriations Human Resources Division
Representative Chet Pollert, Chair
February 2, 2015

Good morning, Chairman Pollert and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division.

My name is Dr. Eric Johnson and I am a Governor-appointed member of the ND Center for Tobacco Prevention and Control Policy Advisory Committee and Executive Committee. I serve in medicine and education leadership roles at the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Grand Forks. I am dedicated to preventive health, which is why I am so involved in preventing tobacco use, the leading cause of preventable disease and death in our state and nation.

I am here to support continued full funding of the statewide comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program through this appropriation for the Executive Committee. In my profession, I have witnessed firsthand the harms tobacco has caused to both our youth and adults in North Dakota. As part of my work with cessation, I know how tobacco use can addict users to nicotine for a lifetime and cause needless pain, suffering and costs to both the nicotine-addicted user and their families.

Fifty-one years after the first Surgeon General's report on smoking and health, we still battle tobacco's harms, even though we've made great progress in identifying these harms and how to prevent them. Today, we know that tobacco causes even more diseases than previously thought and we know the tobacco industry has calibrated the nicotine and other ingredients in tobacco to be even more addictive and harmful than before. We also know what works to stop this deadly epidemic, both in my field of medicine and in our role as citizens in public policy.

The Surgeon General reports that fully funding comprehensive statewide tobacco control programs at Centers for Disease Control recommended levels is paramount to control present and future harms and unnecessary costs of tobacco. This is just one of the legs on the three-legged stool metaphor used by CDC to describe what is needed before we see significantly reduced tobacco use. The other two legs are: a strong statewide smoke-free law, which we have; and a high tobacco tax. North Dakota has one of the lowest tobacco taxes in the nation, lower even than the average tax in tobacco-growing states. We are supporting two bills in the 2015 Legislative session that increase the tax significantly.

Tobacco companies spend an estimated \$27 million/year in North Dakota to promote their products, primarily through price discounts that keep prices low and sales high, according to their latest marketing reports submitted to the Federal Trade Commission: “The amount spent on cigarette advertising and promotion by the largest cigarette companies in the United States rose from \$8.05 billion in 2010 to \$8.37 billion in 2011, due mainly to an increase in spending on price discounts, or discounts paid to cigarette retailers or wholesalers in order to reduce the price of cigarettes to consumers. Spending on price discounts increased from \$6.49 billion in 2010 to \$7.00 billion in in 2011. The price discounts category was the largest one in 2011, as it has been each year since 2002.” (FTC, 2015)

The tobacco industry also increases sales and profits by expanding existing market share and promoting new products, such as e-cigarettes and flavored cigars. The tobacco industry’s goal is to sell more tobacco to current users and to replace those who quit with the next generation of users – our kids. As long as tobacco is promoted, we must fully fund comprehensive tobacco use prevention efforts in North Dakota to keep kids from starting and help users – who were the previous generations of kids who started -- quit for good.

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Memberships:

North Dakota Tobacco Prevention and Control Advisory and Executive Committees (Governor appointment)
American Diabetes Association Primary Care Committee
American Medical Association
North Dakota Medical Association
American Academy of Family Physicians

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Society for Research in Nicotine and Tobacco
Tobacco Free North Dakota Board President
American Diabetes Association North Dakota Affiliate Board President
North Dakota Rural Voters Board
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