

"Stepping Up To Stop Big Tobacco's Global Predation"

Health Board of City-County Health District, Valley City, ND

How many people around the world would die each year if Big Tobacco made all the rules? Do we really want to find out?

Some preventable threats to the public's health are so dire as to call for strong public action from state, regional and national health organizations. The City-County Health District (CCHD) Health Board believes that Big Tobacco's current effort to halt and reverse life-saving tobacco control laws around the globe is one such outrage.

In a nutshell, transnational tobacco conglomerates seek to abuse "investor-state" provisions of international trade agreements in order to prevent the U.S. and other nations from implementing various proven-effective tobacco-use-reduction measures such as: levying import taxes to raise the price of tobacco products, placing large health warning labels on cigarette packages, and restricting tobacco advertising and retail displays.

Yielding to the well-oiled political clout of huge multinationals, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has abandoned a previous Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) proposal that would have protected partner nations' sovereignty to implement critical measures for reducing tobacco use and preventing related deaths and diseases. His current proposal would instead leave the nations' ability to regulate tobacco products vulnerable to tobacco-industry lawsuits brought under TPP provisions.

Sadly, this exploitation is nothing new for an industry willing to devastate the public's health for the sole purpose of increasing corporate profits. In numerous countries (including the U.S., Australia, Uruguay, Norway, and Ireland), the predatory corporations have abused global trade rules to attempt to delay and reverse tobacco control measures that apply to the countries' own respective domestic products.

In response to this situation, on Sept. 24, CCHD's health board decided to send letters to USTR Michael Froman and to North Dakota's Congressional delegation urging them to

exempt tobacco products from the TPP. But CCHD feels that a letter from one local health unit in North Dakota is not enough, and is encouraging all other ND health organizations to also consider:

Drafting and sending a communication to the USTR and to U.S. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, U.S. Sen. John Hoeven, and U.S. Rep. Kevin Cramer urging them to negotiate a new TPP provision that explicitly and completely exempts ("carves out") tobacco products from the agreement; *and*

Distributing the above communication, or a news release summarizing it, to North Dakota's 10 daily newspapers and major TV and radio stations.

CCHD noted that, in drafting their Sept. 24 letter, they relied primarily on 2 sources:

(1) The Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health (CPATH) at <http://www.cpath.org/> which provides a wealth of reliable information regarding Big Tobacco and the TPP, including copies of communications sent by such leading national health groups as the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American College of Physicians (ACP), and the American Public Health Association (APHA). – and – (2) Dr. Stan Glantz, cardiologist, Professor and Director of the Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education at the School of Medicine, University of California-San Francisco [<http://www.tobacco.ucsf.edu/> and glantz@medicine.ucsf.edu]. Dr. Glantz, widely recognized as one of the world's top tobacco control experts, on Sept. 18 explicitly urged all public health professionals to take action: *"The national health organizations, which have been working this issue, should activate their state and local affiliates to generate more press and editorial attention to the TPP and press President Obama to simply endorse the Malaysian proposal to carve tobacco out of the TPP."*

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