

5 LTEs from Bismarck Tribune April 22, 2009

It starts with the smoking

By JAMES HUGHES, Bismarck

Our prisons are filling with young people who are there at taxpayer expense in part because of drug dependence. Ask yourself -- how many addicts practice their addictions without smoking? Factor in the question -- when did they first learn what it was to be addicted, to actively modulate their moods, their heart rates, to change the tone of their body chemistry? When did they first experiment with the illusion of taking control with a powerful, addictive drug? The average age of smokers having their first cigarette is 13. Ninety percent of smokers have the habit by age 18. While they learn to smoke, they learn to systematically and successfully break the law to gain access to nicotine. Of course, most smokers grow up to be successful law-abiding citizens, and many eventually avoid disease by quitting tobacco. Some end up behind bars. Some become law legislators who associate smoking with youthful expressions of independence and freedom rather than suffering, disease and death in the smoking and second-hand smoking public. Do they pay homage to lost youth as they subvert efforts to help North Dakotans quit tobacco? Or are they sucking at the teat of Big Tobacco? Do they work to support health or to perpetuate addiction? Honor the people's vote on Measure 3.

Proving it by using influence

By JEANNE PROM, Bismarck

Last week, North Dakota House Majority Leader Al Carlson tried to prove to the state voters that tobacco use prevention programs are not subject to political influence. How did Rep. Carlson demonstrate this? By subjecting the tobacco use prevention programs to partisan political influence. Yes, that's correct. To prove to us that tobacco use prevention programs are not affected by politics, a few House Republicans tried to use the political influence of their majority power to drastically change Measure 3, a voters' mandate to fund a comprehensive tobacco use prevention and cessation program. It's an odd move to prove a point by disproving the point, but maybe Rep. Carlson and a few other House Republicans thought voters wouldn't figure out their words and deeds were opposites. After all, these were the very same few House members who questioned the intelligence of the voters who passed Measure 3. Rep. Carlson no doubt hoped all House Republicans would vote for significant changes to Measure 3, but, notably, not all played follow-the-leader. Bismarck Republican Representatives Bob Martinson and George Keiser voted against amendments to SB2063, the enabling bill for Measure 3. We need to thank Reps. Martinson and Keiser for their integrity, and for following the wishes of the people. The next day, many other Republican representatives and all but one Democrat joined Reps. Martinson and Keiser and voted against gutting Measure 3 in with amendments to SB2063. All of these representatives deserve our thanks as well. Now, after wisely defeating the amended SB2063, the House may consider a delayed bill to fully fund Measure 3. Providing the bill mirrors the language of the original SB2063 without amendments (which was passed unanimously by the North Dakota Senate), the House has another chance to do the right thing. Rep. Carlson needs to aspire to the name of the body

whose majority he leads -- the state House of Representatives -- represent the voters of North Dakota and their mandate in Measure 3, and help pass a bill to enable the measure, intact and without political influence.

Big tobacco is fighting hard

By CAROL RUSSELL, Bismarck

A battle royal is going on in the North Dakota Legislature as we speak. All signs indicate that tobacco companies, alive and well in North Dakota, are doing everything they can to keep money from going into an effective tobacco control program. That's their objective. When Measure 3 as intended by the voters hits the road, they stand to lose corporate profits they so dearly love and the opportunity to addict future generations to keep those profits flowing. No wonder they're going at it tooth and nail, recruiting North Dakota allies -- legislators, media, organizations and any number of spokespersons -- who willfully or unwittingly do Big Tobacco's bidding. Probably heading that list is Rep. Al Carlson. His arrogance and opposition to Measure 3 is tantamount to thumbing his nose at the voters, especially those in his district who led the state in creating a smoke-free Fargo. Those voters need to hold him accountable. We had similar battles in California -- legislature vs. the people -- when we started our tobacco control program. That was almost 20 years ago. But the people won. Does Big Tobacco ever give up? No. It's painful for me to watch the same scenario play out in my own home state that I love. North Dakotans deserve better. If we want to make a difference to help stop a source of health problems of breathtaking proportions, we must ask Rep. Carlson and others if they're part of the problem or part of the solution. (The writer is retired chief of the California Tobacco Control Program. -- Editor)

Voters already did their part

By SHARON BUHR, Valley City

I'm confused. Fargo legislator Al Carlson, who has been working hard to thwart enactment of Measure 3, said, "It's up to them," meaning supporters of Measure 3. What does he want us to do? We, the voters, have already passed the measure. Our job is done. Now we expect legislators to do their job, namely: appropriate the funds to implement this measure. Clearly, Carlson is trying to coerce Measure 3's legislative champions to cave in to his demands for gutting the measure. Carlson has repeatedly claimed that voters didn't know what they were doing when they passed Measure 3, and didn't even know they were authorizing an independent committee to implement the new tobacco control program. This is not credible, given the abundance of news stories and legislators' commentaries airing questions specifically about the new "executive committee." Furthermore, the ballot title's first sentence addresses the committee. To assert that voters were ignorant is a disingenuous accusation that demeans North Dakota's voters. The independent executive committee is critical to ensuring that comprehensive, science-based tobacco prevention and cessation will be fully implemented and protected from adverse political influence. Here's why. For years the Department of Health has been constrained by leadership not vested in tobacco control. In 1999, when tobacco settlement dollars were allocated, the Legislature divided them 45 percent for water resources, 45 percent to the school lands trust and 10 percent to a Health Care Trust Fund. That "inadequate tobacco settlement dollars were trickling down for tobacco control" was not argued by the Health Department because of political pressure. The Health Department has never proposed full funding for the CDC formula for truly effective tobacco prevention/cessation. Not once. Carlson also knows that good work done by independent committees is

common. For example, the Commission on Legal Counsel for Indigents resulted from human rights efforts from the judiciary; yet one could argue that this commission should be subsumed by another state agency. Other well-functioning, free-standing agencies include the Protection and Advocacy Agency, Aeronautics Commission and the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. One final and most interesting comparison is with the State Water Commission. Maybe this commission should come under another agency? That won't happen because its mission requires special attention and focused dedication -- and the same is required for the single-largest contributor to preventable disease and death, the tobacco epidemic.

Why wouldn't he like Measure 3?

By MARY TINTES, West Fargo

I'm wondering why Al Carlson does not like Measure No. 3, even though most North Dakotans clearly do. Could it be because Measure 3 was deliberately designed to prevent politicians like Carlson from controlling and intimidating the public-health professionals designated to run this program? Carlson and other legislative pawns of the tobacco industry have for years intimidated the Department of Health into only timidly working on a proven-effective tobacco-control program. As a result, very little has been done to seriously rein in the leading cause of preventable death and disease. Consequently, in November 2008, citizens organized and the voters decided: We have had enough of inaction; we want tobacco control to be free of politics and done right. North Dakotans want Measure 3 implemented promptly and faithfully, so that we can finally get started on a serious program to: (1) reduce adult and youth tobacco use in North Dakota; (2)

avert future tobacco-caused disease, suffering and premature deaths in North Dakota; and (3) reduce future healthcare costs in North Dakota. But those pesky citizens didn't know that Rep. Carlson does not like being told what to do by voters. So once again voters need to send a message loud and clear: Rep. Carlson, "man up" and do the right thing. Do what the voters told you to do and support Measure No. 3 with an appropriation.