

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on Signing the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009

June 22, 2009

The President. Please, everybody, have a seat, have a seat. I am thrilled to be here for what is I think an extraordinary accomplishment by this Congress, a bill we're about to sign into law.

I want to acknowledge a few of our special guests. First of all, we've got the crew from the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids: Eamon, Christopher, Sarah, and Hoai-Nam. We have our FDA Commissioner, Dr. Peggy Hamburg. We have our CDC Director, Tom Frieden. And we have just some extraordinary Members of Congress here on stage—Senator Dodd, Senator Durbin, Senator Enzi, Senator Harkin, Senator Lautenberg, Representative Waxman, Representative Dingell, Representative Christensen, Representative Pallone, and Representative Platts—all of whom did extraordinary work in helping to move this legislation forward. Please give them a big round of applause. I want to thank all of them.

Now, there are three Members of Congress that I have to especially thank: Representative Waxman, Representative Dodd, and—excuse me—[*laughter*]*—Senator Dodd—*

Senator Chris Dodd. Things are tough enough. [*Laughter*]

The President. —and most importantly, Senator Ted Kennedy, who can't be here today.

You know, the legislation I'm signing today represents change that's been decades in the making. Since at least the middle of the last century, we've known about the harmful and often deadly effects of tobacco products. More than 400,000 Americans now die of tobacco-related illnesses each year, making it the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. More than 8 million Americans suffer from at least one serious illness caused by smoking, and these health problems cost us all more than \$100 billion a year.

What's even worse are the effects on our children. One out of every five children in our country are now current smokers by the time they leave high school. Think about that statistic, one out of every five children in our country are now current smokers by the time they leave high school. Each day, 1,000 young people under the age of 18 become new, regular, daily smokers. And almost 90 percent of all smokers began at or before their 18th birthday.

I know; I was one of these teenagers, and so I know how difficult it can be to break this habit when it's been with you for a long time. And I also know that kids today don't just start smoking for no reason. They're aggressively targeted as customers by the tobacco industry. They're exposed to a constant and insidious barrage of advertising where they live, where they learn, and where they play. Most insidiously, they are offered products with flavorings that mask the taste of tobacco and make it even more tempting.

We've known about this for decades, but despite the best efforts and good progress made by so many leaders and advocates with us today, the tobacco industry and its special interest lobbying have generally won the day up on the Hill. When Henry Waxman first brought tobacco CEOs before Congress in 1994, they famously denied that tobacco was deadly, nicotine was addictive, or that their companies marketed to children. And they spent millions upon millions in lobbying and advertising to fight back every attempt to expose these denials as lies.

Fifteen years later, their campaign has finally failed. Today, thanks to the work of Democrats and Republicans, health care and consumer advocates, the decades-long effort to protect our children from the harmful effects of tobacco has emerged victorious. Today change has come to Washington.

This legislation will not ban all tobacco products, and it will allow adults to make their own choices. But it will also ban tobacco advertising within a thousand feet of schools and playgrounds. It will curb the ability of tobacco companies to market products to our children by using appealing flavors. It will force these companies to more clearly and publicly acknowledge the harmful and deadly effects of the products they sell. And it will allow the scientists at the FDA to take other commonsense steps to reduce the harmful effects of smoking.

This legislation is a victory for bipartisanship, and it was passed overwhelmingly in both Houses of Congress. It's a victory for health care reform, as it will reduce some of the billions we spend on tobacco-related health care costs in this country. It's a law that will reduce the number of American children who pick up a cigarette and become adult smokers. And most importantly, it is a law that will save American lives and make Americans healthier.

We know that even with the passage of this legislation, our work to protect our children and improve the public's health is not complete. Today, tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death not just in America, but also in the world. If current trends continue, 1 billion people will die from tobacco-related illnesses this century. And so the United States will continue to work with the World Health Organization and other nations to fight this epidemic on a global basis.

But no matter how long or how hard this fight may be, what's happening today gives us hope. When I ran for President, I did so because I believed that despite the power of the status quo and the influence of special interests, it was possible for us to bring change to Washington. And the progress we've made these past 5 months has only reinforced my faith in this belief.

Despite the influence of the credit card industry, we passed a law to protect consumers from unfair rate hikes and abusive fees. Despite the influence of banks and lenders, we passed a law to protect homeowners from mortgage fraud. Despite the influence of the defense industry, we passed a law to protect taxpayers from waste and abuse in defense contracting. And today, despite decades of lobbying and advertising by the tobacco industry, we've passed a law to help protect the next generation of Americans from growing up with a deadly habit that so many of our generation have lived with.

When Henry Waxman opened that first hearing back in '94 on tobacco with the industry CEOs, he began by quoting an ancient proverb: "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Our journey for change is far from over. But with the package of—passage of the kids tobacco legislation that I'm about to sign, we're taking another big and very important step, a step that will save lives and dollars. So I want to thank not only the Members of Congress who are up on stage, but also all the Members of Congress in the audience and all the health advocates that fought for so long for this to happen. We hope you feel good about the extraordinary service that you've rendered this country. Thank you very much. Let's go sign the bill.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:04 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Eamon McGoldrick, Christopher E. Wiggins, Sarah L. Wiggins, and Hoai-Nam Ngoc Bui, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids; and Delegate Donna M. Christensen of the U.S. Virgin Islands. H.R. 1256, approved June 22, was assigned Public Law No. 111–31.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009, remarks.

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Names: Christensen, Donna M.; Dingell, John D. Jr.; Dodd, Christopher J.; Durbin, Richard J.; Enzi, Michael B.; Frieden, Thomas R.; Hamburg, Margaret ; Harkin, Thomas R.; Kennedy, Edward M.; Lautenberg, Frank R.; McGoldrick, Eamon; Ngoc Bui, Hoai-Nam; Pallone, Frank, Jr.; Platts, Todd; Waxman, Henry A.; Wiggins, Christopher E.; Wiggins, Sarah L.

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