

VIEWPOINTS

OUR VIEW: STATE'S PRE-K PROGRAM IS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT WE DO RIGHT, AND WRONG 2F

HEALTH

Let's tackle tobacco's harm with force



Nearly half a century after the surgeon general's report, cigarettes still kill too many Americans

By ALAN BLUM

To observe the 1980 World Health Day theme of "Smoking or Health — The Choice is Yours," 24 countries issued an anti-smoking postage stamp.

Since then, 41 other countries have recognized the importance of tackling the tobacco pandemic by issuing such stamps.

The United States is not among those 65 countries with an anti-smoking stamp.

Dr. W. Jeff Terry, president-elect of the Medical Association of the

State of Alabama, wants the medical profession and the public alike to correct this glaring oversight. Last month, the American Medical Association approved his resolution that calls on physicians to campaign for a stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health.

In the two decades following the report, more than 20 million Americans kicked the habit, resulting in a significant decline in heart attacks and a slow but steady decrease in lung cancer in men.

The Alabama connection is important, because the individual most responsible for the report was Dr. Luther Terry (1911-1985), a native son of Red Level and a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College

(and cousin of Jeff Terry).

In 2002, Luther Terry was inducted posthumously into the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame for his contributions as surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service, the nation's physician in chief, from 1961 to 1965.

The report was the culmination of growing scientific concerns about cigarette smoking over four decades. By 1940, one of the most outspoken opponents of smoking, Dr. Alton Ochsner of Tulane University, would publish his observations on the association between cigarettes and lung cancer, citing more than 400 reports in medical journals. In 1961, the presidents of several health groups, including the

TOM SCARRITT

Jefferson County reboot brings hope

Sometimes, our computers become so dysfunctional our only option is to reboot.

We may lose some of our work in progress, but at least we have a clean interface with all the systems we need to get the job done. We can move forward.

Jefferson County voters have rebooted county government, booting out the only sitting commissioner who had the audacity to seek re-election. After the November general



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SMOKING: U.S. needs stamp of disapproval

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American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, urged President John F. Kennedy to establish a commission to study the mounting evidence of the adverse health effects of smoking.

Terry was charged with producing an expert scientific review of the subject. (Among the 10 eminent biomedical scientists asked to form the committee to write the report was Dr. Mickey LeMaistre, a distinguished alumnus of the University of Alabama.) Meeting in secret for 14 months from November 1962 at the National Library of Medicine (named after U.S. Sen. Lister Hill of Alabama), the committee reviewed more than 7,000 scientific articles on smoking, as well as information provided by the tobacco industry.

The 387-page report, issued on Jan. 11, 1964, at a packed press conference, hit the country like a bombshell, making front-page headlines in virtually every newspaper in the country. Writing in the New York State Journal of Medicine in 1983, Terry recalled, "The report not only carried a strong condemnation of tobacco usage, especially cigarette smoking, but conveyed its message in such clear and concise language that it could not be misunderstood."

There was no minority report. Terry was exceptionally proud of the fact that of the "more than 30,000 articles published in the 20 years since the report, almost without exception they confirm



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the committee's findings and extend the knowledge of the health hazards of smoking."

Terry spent the rest of his life as a spokesperson for the anti-smoking movement and fought hard to eliminate smoking from the workplace.

It is fitting to recall Terry's appeal to physicians in 1983 not to be complacent about fighting cigarette smoking — or the tobacco industry: "The abuses of the cigarette companies are too numerous to mention. It is clear that they do not want the public to recognize the health hazards and the enormous financial cost to society caused by smoking. Therefore, health professionals must take back the leadership role."

"I hope that every member of the medical profession will recognize this responsibility and will be committed to spreading the message that tobacco smoking is the single most preventable cause of disability and death in the United States."

Nearly half a century after the

surgeon general's report, cigarettes still kill more Americans than AIDS, breast cancer, sickle cell disease, motor vehicle accidents, alcohol, illegal drugs, homicides, suicides and fires combined. A stamp commemorating Terry's monumental report will be an important symbol to remind us all to help protect the next generation from the needless suffering caused by cigarette smoking.

Alan Blum, M.D., directs the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. An exhibition of the center's collection of the world's anti-smoking postage stamps will be on view at the Alabama Museum of the Health Sciences from Monday through Sept. 15. To support a stamp commemorating Dr. Luther Terry's release of the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, write to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee c/o Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 1735 N. Lynn St., Suite 5013, Arlington, VA 22209-6432.

Contrast on some issues is stark

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culture."

To hear whites tell it, what really bothers them is a growing federal government that they fear will intervene in their lives — unless there's an oil spill along the Gulf Coast, of course, in which case their complaint is too little intervention. Budget deficits are a worry, too, unless it's George Bush running up the red ink.

But, as Buchanan and Beck have noted, there is no escaping the role of race in the animosity toward Obama.

Whites, for instance, are overwhelmingly in favor of Arizona's immigration law, according to most polls. And virtually none of the surveys has shown any concern for the rights of nonwhite Hispanics who would be subject to racial profiling and illegal search and seizures. These are the same people who like to wave copies of the U.S. Constitution and claim Obama is curtailing their freedoms.

"The differences between whites and nonwhites on (the Arizona immigration law) are very stark," Matthew Kerbel, a political scientist at Villanova University, told the Christian Science Monitor. "The numbers seem to reflect that among white American voters, there is something that needs to be done about illegal immigration and that the Arizona law addresses that. But among blacks and Hispanics, the law is viewed as a strong form of racial profiling, and so there is strong sentiment against it."

Amazing, really, how people from German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and Russian backgrounds can land



Despite resistance from those who have a death grip on white privilege, we are becoming a nation of people having origins not in geography but in humanity.

conniption fit because Obama is supposedly helping the poor people rather than the middle class or the rich.

"The overwhelming majority of supporters say Mr. Obama does not share the values most Americans live by and that he does not understand the problems of people like themselves." The Times report on the poll said. "More than half say the policies of the administration favor the poor, and 25 percent think that the administration favors blacks over whites."

Tell that to black people who live in places such as Southeast Washington, where the unemployment rate exceeds 30 percent.

As for those who would claim that blacks relish their racial designation as much as whites do theirs, just remember that if white people didn't insist on being white, there would be no such thing as race.

Eventually, though, everyone