

On January 25, New York University announced that, in recognition of a \$30 million donation from Larry Tisch and Preston Robert Tisch, the University Hospital at NYU Medical Center would be officially renamed The Tisch Hospital, The University Hospital of NYU Medical Center. The announcement prompted an exchange of letters between John Brademas, NYU's president, and Dr. William G. Cahan, a senior attending surgeon at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Excerpts from the letters appear below.

The Tisch contribution will go toward construction of a new biomolecular research building, which will also include housing for nurses and residents. This gift—the largest single donation in NYU Medical Center's history—brings to over \$40 million the amount the Tisch family has given to NYU. Other major gifts include \$2 million in 1972 to build Tisch Hall at the Washington Square campus, and \$7.5 million in 1982 to what became the Tisch School of the Arts. In addition, Larry Tisch has been chairman of the university's board of trustees for ten years; Preston Tisch is also a board member.

Cahan, whose speciality is lung cancer, has attacked the renaming on the grounds that, through the Loews Corporation, the Tisch brothers own Lorillard, which makes Newport, Kent, and True cigarettes, among others. Together with media guru Tony Schwartz, Cahan has also put together a radio spot—so far aired only on WMCA—inviting listeners to “keep on smoking those cancer Newports . . . the Tisches have a hospital bed waiting for you.”

Schwartz and Cahan are continuing what Schwartz has labeled a “guerrilla war” against tobacco interests. NYU says the hospital's renaming ceremony will be held sometime this fall, though the hospital's stationery already reflects the change.

February 1, 1989

Dear John:

About a year ago, as you and I walked through the Museum of Modern Art (our busy wives couldn't make it), I asked your opinion about the ethics of educational and cultural institutions accepting funds from tobacco interests, when it is clear that such funds were given for their PR effect: to launder the tobacco company's nicotine-stained image.

You . . . agreed it was, indeed, an enigma. You pointed out how difficult it is for cash-poor institutions to resist readily available tobacco monies . . . I felt that this was scant justification for institutions doing so as, I am sure, they are well aware that hundreds of thousands of people have been, and are being, maimed and killed each year by tobacco products.

Now . . . not only has NYU accepted a major donation from executives of a tobacco company, it is also about to name its hospital after them.

Surely, such an action raises questions as to the propriety of accepting funds from individuals . . . whose wealth was, and is being, amassed at the expense of our country's health. My guess is that at least one out of six adult patients at University Hospital . . . are there because they smoked. Are the hospital staff . . . aware that Loews Corporation (the Tisch brothers' main holding) owns P. Lorillard and Company who make Kent, Old Gold, Newport, Satin and True cigarettes?

More and more . . . institutions are . . . refusing to accept tobacco companies' donations, even if they are assured that there would be “no strings attached.” They feel, as I do, that the time has come when principle should

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THE TISCH HOSPITAL LETTERS



prevail over standard business practices that are known to be amoral. . . .

This is not a personal diatribe against Larry and Preston Tisch, both of whom I know, who may have pure motives for their philanthropy. However, they are part of a system that enables those responsible for Holocaust-sized slaughter to use cynical means to buy respectability. By association, those who accept their gifts, are tainted as well.

I will be anxious to hear your reactions to this.

My best to the beautiful M.D.
Sincerely,
William G. Cahan, M.D.

February 12, 1989

Dear Bill:

Thanks for your letter of February 1, 1989 . . . As you have been candid in voicing your opinion, you will, I am sure, want me to be equally candid in reply. Aware of your concern, I agree with neither your analysis nor your conclusion.

We at New York University are deeply grateful to the Tisch family for this extraordinary gift . . . and we are proud to have the name of Tisch on our hospital.

It would, obviously, be wrong for the university knowingly to accept funds that were the result of unlawful activities. This is not, of course, true of the instant case. Nor is your representation accurate that this gift is from “tobacco interests.” Loews Corporation—and I am a director—is also in insurance, watch, hotel and shipping businesses; and Laurence A. Tisch, as you know, is president and chief executive officer of CBS.

You are also wrong in your assertion that “such funds were given for their PR effect: to launder the tobacco company's nicotine-stained image.” . . .

Having for several years dealt with both Larry and Bob Tisch, I can flatly assure you that at no time have I heard a word from either to justify your allegation that their contributions “were given . . . to launder the tobacco company's nicotine-stained image.” . . .

Allow me, Bill, one other observation. Were one to accept your logic, no educational or cultural institution should accept contributions from, for example, manufacturers of automobiles, which, to use your words, “maim and kill hundreds of thousands of people each year.”

I must object as well to your assertion that “Larry and Preston Tisch . . . are part of a system that enables those responsible for Holocaust-sized slaughter to use cynical means to buy respectability.” Beyond the inaccuracy of the charge, such extravagant rhetoric, I hope you would on reflection agree, demeans the significance of the Holocaust. . . .

You know that I have great admiration for you both as a person and as a physician, and I, therefore, take your candor as a mark of our friendship

even as I trust you will receive my comments in the same fashion.

My best to la bella Mirabella.
Sincerely,
John Brademas

February 28, 1989

Dear John:

I realize that I may have put you in a difficult spot, so that I doubly appreciate the friendly tone of your answer as you took issue with several of my points. . . .

I do not intend to discuss the huge ethical question as to the morality of accepting large donations from those engaged in questionable practices. What I feel is unequivocal, however, is that NYU's gratitude and affection for the Tisches has blinded it to the irony of naming NYU's hospital after two executives with a long and close relationship with cigarette manufactur-

ing. As a fellow Loews board member, you know that it owns 100 percent of P. Lorillard and Company. As Lorillard has 8 percent of the cigarette market, it probably contributes to some 31,000 of the 390,000 cigarette-smoking related deaths that occur annually in this country. . . .

You state that NYU accepts donations only from legal sources. As an academic, as well as a former Congressman, you must realize that “legal” does not always stand for moral. In this case, there is no escaping the fact that, for profit, Lorillard and other tobacco giants are the chief causes of preventable deaths in America.

In justifying accepting cigarette makers' funds, you state that if one were to follow my reasoning, it would be equally wrong to accept donations from automobile manufacturers (your example) whose products also kill thousands. For the record, recent statistics show that in the USA, there are 20,000 traffic deaths each year, plus an equivalent number due to drunken driving. As somber as these statistics are, it is a far cry from the 390,000 deaths due to cigarette-related diseases, or the 8 million Americans who have died from smoking since the Surgeon General's report in 1964. Besides, automobiles are essential; cigarettes are not. . . .

If the Tisches are as public spirited as you suggest, and if they are sincerely interested in the health and welfare of the community, they could: 1) discontinue Loews' cigarette business; and 2) subsidize youth antismoking campaigns. In terms of good being done for the largest numbers, these measures would be unmatched.

As President of NYU, you are probably insulated from the many smoking-related tragedies physicians witness every day. Let me suggest that you visit your University Hospital's floors or, for that matter, any hospital's floors, and see at first hand, as physicians do, the enormous dimensions of the havoc created by cigarette smoking. Perhaps it would also bring home to you the sad travesty of one of Lorillard's slogans: “Alive With Pleasure.” . . .

It will be difficult for NYU to reverse its commitment and maintain University Hospital's time-honored name, nevertheless, I can see no alternative. . . .

I hope that, in the spirit of open-mindedness and friendship, you will give my letter some thought. As always, I welcome hearing from you.
Sincerely yours,
William G. Cahan, M.D.

March 6, 1989

Dear Bill:

Thanks for your further letter of February 28, 1989. Apparently, we must agree to disagree.

With very best wishes.
Sincerely,
John Brademas