



FIAN ARROYO / Miami Herald

# S FIGHTING SMOKE WITH FIRE & SATIRE

*Paid counter-advertising is needed to engage young people in a true understanding of the devastating economic and physical toll taken by tobacco use.*

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By ALAN BLUM

Last month, for the first time in 20 years, a U.S. Senate committee met to consider the subject of cigarette advertising and ways to combat it. The Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources held a hearing on a bill by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., to establish a federally-funded Tobacco Education Center, a principal goal of which would be to purchase counter-advertising in the mass media, to undermine the influence of tobacco promotions directed at young people.



Blum

That such a hearing was held at all

## IS TARGETED ADVERTISING DEAD?, 1G

suggests not only that the tobacco industry may be losing clout on Capitol Hill but also that several sad and costly realities may have finally struck home:

■ The annual American death toll from tobacco-induced diseases is now nearly 400,000.

■ Heart disease, lung cancer and emphysema account for most deaths from smoking, but cancers of the tongue, vocal cords, esophagus, pancreas and cervix are also closely related to tobacco use, as is the need to amputate limbs due to poor circulation.

■ In spite of all the advances in medical technology, the survival rate for lung cancer has remained approximately the same as it was 30 years ago: Only one person in 20 will live five years or more after the diagnosis is made.

■ Lung cancer has now surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of death among women.

■ Nor is lung cancer any longer a disease of old people. It is striking more and more men and women in

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# Fighting smoke with fire & satire

SMOKING, FROM 1C

their late 30s and early 40s. Until former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and now Secretary of Health Louis Sullivan spoke out in no uncertain terms about the deceptive nature of cigarette advertising, elected officials, government bureaucrats, medical school researchers and the media alike were fearful of confronting the real source of the smoking pandemic: the wealthy and influential tobacco industry.

Now all unite in outrage over the targeting of women and minorities in tobacco advertising, and the use of sports to promote cigarettes, as if these practices have only recently begun. Yet it is illusory to believe that there exists in this country a major mass media effort designed to engage young people in a true understanding of the devastating economic and physical toll taken by tobacco use. To any adolescent who reads Sports Illustrated, Rolling Stone, SPIN, Playboy, National Lampoon or Mademoiselle, the presence of cigarette advertising clearly suggests that smoking is associated with good looks, sexiness, success and athletic ability. But bad health or even bad breath? Not on your life.

Teachers and health professionals alike have long expressed frustration over their inability to cut teenage tobacco use. Generic lectures and warnings about the dangers of smoking simply cannot compete with the allure of imagery for Marlboro, Camel and other popular adolescent brands that meet teen-agers' needs for autonomy and social acceptance.

The tobacco industry has also been adept at exploiting racial identity in defining a profitable market among ethnic minorities. In addition to their constant presence on the news, sports, fashion and lifestyle pages of newspapers in the black community, tobacco companies are their leading advertisers. As part of a salute to Black History Month in February, R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris featured discount coupons in Ebony and other magazines for various brands of cigarettes, complete with pictures of famous black scientists such as George Washington Carver.

Indeed, seldom has a tobacco advertisement or company asked us to smoke. Instead, they invite us to

join them at a party or sports events — such as last month's Marlboro Soccer Cup and the Camel GT of the Grand Prix auto race in Miami, and Virginia Slims of Florida, a tobacco-sponsored tennis tournament featuring a 13-year-old girl's professional debut. Often such sporting events benefit local hospitals. Truth may be good, but juxtaposition is better.

To appreciate the importance of funding a counter-advertising campaign such as Sen. Kennedy has proposed, it is necessary to recall how cigarette advertising has changed its face over the years.

In 1967 a recent law school graduate named John Banzhaf became upset that cigarette advertising continued to appear on television as if the findings of the surgeon general's report was yesterday's news. He petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a fair opportunity for the other side of smoking to be told. The FCC agreed, a decision that led the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and other organizations to produce commercials to counteract smoking.

These counter-advertisements, such as one featuring actor William Talman (the district attorney on TV's *Perry Mason* who was dying from lung cancer at the time he made the commercial), were quite successful in slowing the rise in cigarette sales among young people. So successful, in fact, that in 1969 the tobacco companies asked Congress, in exchange for an antitrust exemption, to remove their own advertisements from television and radio.

But when Congress went along with this request, counter-advertising also dropped out of sight.

Once off the air, cigarette companies became the top advertisers in most major magazines and stepped up their sponsorships of entertainment and sporting events. This method got cigarettes back on television with some decided advantages over controversial advertising: It was less expensive, for one thing, and it was more effective. Most important, with counter-advertisements effectively out of sight, the sales of cigarettes resumed an upward course.

In 1977, as a family physician in training at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital and with the encouragement of Dade County Medical Examiner Joe Davis, I founded Doctors Ought to Care with the idea of



United Press International

**EMPHYSEMA SLIMS:** Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan displays a T-shirt spoofing the Virginia Slims pro tennis circuit as the Medical Society of the District of Columbia held an anti-smoking protest last month.

bringing back and expanding upon the very positive health values successfully promoted in the 1967-69 counter-advertising campaign. Unable to purchase billboard space in Miami because of the billboard companies' refusal to permit us to compete side-by-side with cigarette advertisers, I called Jack Waxenberg at the Bus Bench Co. in Hialeah. Waxenberg was delighted to sell DOC space for our messages.

Opposite a huge downtown billboard that said, "Come to Marlboro Country," we put up a bench that said, "Country Fresh Arsenic." When one brand called Decade advertised itself as "the taste that took 10 years to make," DOC responded with "Emphysema — the disease that took a decade to make."

DOC also began to create various counter-events to call attention to tobacco-sponsored promotions. The Benson and Heart Attack Film Fest-

tival, The Not Smoking Is Cool Jazz Festival, the Barboro Country Music Show and the Emphysema Slims Tennis Tournament are all actual events created by DOC chapters across the country. The first national Emphysema Slims Tennis Tournament and tennis clinic for kids last year in Santa Fe, N.M., attracted three Olympic gold medal winners, numerous entertainment figures and tennis stars.

DOC has also ventured into sports sponsorship on a larger scale. When DOC learned in 1988 that the U.S. Boomerang Team was about to depart for a major international competition and was sponsored by a cigarette company, DOC offered itself as a substitute sponsor. Under its sponsorship, the team won while wearing the international no-smoking logo.

It is DOC's hope to inspire other health organizations to counteract the influence of tobacco promotions

by sponsoring local and national sports teams with a "Just Say No to Marlboro and Camel theme." (Camel and Marlboro are the top-selling brands among American teen-agers.) In addition, DOC plans to ask the U.S. attorney general to enforce the law against televised tobacco advertising, now aired in the form of tobacco-sponsored sporting events.

At countless school assemblies, classroom lectures and Superhealth conferences, DOC members have developed counter-advertising strategies to support DOC's motto of "laughing the pushers out of town." Since most, if not all, new tobacco users come from the 8- to 18-year-old age group, who could doubt that the tobacco industry has not carefully researched this marketing? Peer pressure can be bought, signed, sealed and delivered on Madison Avenue.

Despite an advertising blitzkrieg

second to none, the tobacco and advertising industries would have the public believe that adolescents have heard the facts about "both sides" and now have a "free choice" to decide whether or not to smoke "when they grow up." In claiming that it does not approve of young people smoking, the tobacco industry offers peer pressure, parental smog and "a climate of general rebelliousness among teen-agers" as the reasons for adolescents taking up this neglected cornerstone of drug abuse.

Meanwhile, the tobacco industry runs a year-round campaign with virtually no planned exposure for opposing messages (\$3 billion annually versus less than \$4 million in government public service announcements, pamphlets and posters) in newspapers, magazines, supermarkets and television. Every child grows up seeing thousands of larger-than-life billboards for cigarettes and countless sports-associated tobacco promotions.

Classroom-based education with an emphasis on the physical effects of smoking is only one, limited way to tackle the adolescent smoking pandemic. Cigarette advertising and promotions can keep up with the latest fads in its portrayal of smoking so as to remain "in" far better than even the most talented and motivated teachers and parents. Counter-advertising helps to educate young people not only about the preventable factors responsible for bad health and high medical costs but also about the insidiousness of the outright promotion of those factors.

There are precedents for government expenditures on public-interest advertising, such as the current military recruitment promotions during television sporting events. In the case of smoking, purchase of advertising space is especially essential. Unlike the heavily publicized Media-Advertising Partnership of a Drug-Free America, which has received millions of dollars in donated space in the print media and free air time on television and radio, media corporations are too covetous of tobacco industry advertising revenue to run free advertising to discourage the sale of cigarettes.

Perhaps it is time for a private Citizens Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Media. In the meantime, paid counter-advertising such as Sen. Kennedy has proposed will go a long way toward laughing the pushers out of town.