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STATEMENT OF GREG LOUGANIS

ON BEHALF OF THE
COALITION ON SMOKING OR HEALTH

REGARDING
"TOBACCO SPONSORSHIP OF SPORTING EVENTS"

BEFORE THE
INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE ON SMOKING AND HEALTH

OCTOBER 27, 1988



Good morning Dr. Koop and members of the Committee. I am Greg Louganis, and I am here today representing the Coalition on Smoking OR Health and its member organizations -- the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, and the American Health Association. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this meeting on tobacco sponsorship of sporting events.

I recently returned from Seoul, Korea, where I represented the United States at the Summer Olympics, and where I won my third and fourth Olympic gold medals in diving. I began diving when I was 9 years old. I started smoking when I was 8. I smoked for 15 years until, when I was 23, a 12 year old kid told me he smoked because he wanted to be just like me. Realizing that I was a role model for this kid and many others like him, and I had the ability to provide a positive example to children, I quit smoking. But simply quitting was not enough; I began doing volunteer work for the American Cancer Society in order to reach a greater number of people with the message that smoking is harmful to our health.

I wanted to be a conscientious public health advocate, but Philip Morris Tobacco Company stood in my way. At the time, I was training for the 1984 Olympics in Mission Viejo,

California. The training facility that I used was owned by the Mission Viejo Realty Group, which is a subsidiary of Philip Morris. When the American Cancer Society asked me to be the national chairman of the annual Great American Smokeout in 1984, I was told that if I did not keep a low profile about smoking, I would be barred from training at Mission Viejo. Even worse, it meant losing the guidance of my coach, Ron O'Brien, who worked for Mission Viejo. With the Olympics only a few months away, I had no choice but to turn down the Chairmanship of the Great American Smokeout and instead concentrate on my training.

I felt like, to some extent, I had become a slave to a tobacco company. My thoughts were no longer mine to speak to a national audience. My success at diving made me a role model for children, but I was pressured to avoid national exposure while teaching them what I knew about smoking, because it was against the interests of Philip Morris. And Philip Morris representatives made it very clear that if I continued to speak out nationally, my career at, and association, with Mission Viejo would be over.

By sponsoring sporting events and facilities, tobacco companies make athletes and sports associations indebted to, and dependent upon, them. Once we have the support of a tobacco company, the threat of a withdrawal of that support is just too frightening to consider. Perhaps this explains

why the Board of Directors of the Women's International Tennis Association voted last June to retain the sponsorship of Philip Morris for the annual women's professional tennis tour, even when another company, one with no tobacco connections, had submitted a better bid for sponsorship than Philip Morris.

Sponsors of special events, whether they are sporting events or not, customarily make their name and logo very visible at the event. And tobacco companies are not stupid -- they know very well that sponsoring televised sporting events provides them with free television coverage for their company even though advertising of tobacco products on broadcast media has been prohibited by law for almost two decades. And tobacco companies know that sponsorship of sporting and other cultural events lends them legitimacy by association.

Children also watch sporting events. They see athletes who, to them, represent good health, self-confidence, strength, and fame. The children also see tobacco logos. They cannot help but see the signs around the skating rinks, the baseball fields, the basketball courts, the race course, and the tennis courts. These children are receiving a mixed message -- they are forced to associate tobacco products with healthy people.

It is now widely understood that smoking kills more people annually than automobile accidents, homicide, suicide, AIDS, fires, heroin, cocaine, and alcohol COMBINED. And yet, \$2.5 billion is spent annually to promote and advertise deadly tobacco products.

Tobacco companies have plenty to gain by encouraging the perception of affiliation between athletes and smoking. Philip Morris attempted to keep me from going national with my anti-smoking message because they knew they had a lot to lose if I broke this perception. The biggest losers, however, are those who are convinced by the tobacco companies' assertions of the benefits of smoking, because over 300,000 of them die from smoking every year.