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Christopher D. Carroll (CN=Christopher D. Carroll/OU=CEA/O=EOP [CEA])

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Today's Papers From Slate Magazine (<http://www.slate.com>)

Butt Heads Butt Heads

By Scott Shuger

The en masse defection of the major tobacco manufacturers from Congress' efforts at a settlement leads everywhere. The industry promises to immediately launch a public relations offensive against a "coercive, Big Brother-type Congress." The WP says the campaign kicks off today with newspaper ads reading, "We Agreed To Change The Way We Do Business . . . Not To Go Out Of Business." Everybody quotes President Clinton's determined reaction: "They can be part of it or they can fight it," although oddly, USAT leaves out the most important part of his quote: "We're going to get this done."

The tobacco stance became official with a speech against the tough and expensive Senate bill by the RJR CEO, Steven Goldstone, described by the papers as "aggressive" and "defiant." Goldstone is widely quoted as saying, "Washington has rushed to collect more

tobacco revenues while playing the politics of punishment." USAT quotes him describing the process as "broken beyond repair." The LAT adds that Goldstone raised the specter of a thriving black market in cigarettes if the Senate bill were to become law.

The NYT and USAT point out that while Congress can proceed unilaterally in many areas of the proposed legislation, this is problematic with the provisions that touch on the curtailment of free speech, such as advertising restrictions. Goldstone is quoted in the Times saying that if Congress imposes these anyway, the companies "will fight in court." Feelings are running just as high on the other side. The paper quotes the reaction of Sen. Kent Conrad: "Poor babies." Both the NYT and WP note that Conrad expressed the idea that all this tobacco manufacturer stridency is a stratagem designed to get the current deal accepted without the addition of any harsher conditions.

The NYT is admirably clear about the context producing such skepticism: "The tobacco industry has dissembled so often in the past--about whether cigarettes cause diseases, about whether nicotine is addictive, about whether they market their product to children--that people are never sure what to make of the companies' pronouncements." Now, if only the Times had said "lied" instead of "dissembled".

The WSJ seems a little less surprised by all this, claiming that "the reality is that tobacco companies for weeks have been closed out of

the legislative process." The Journal also sends along word that Mississippi Attorney General Michael Moore, an architect of last summer's original tobacco deal, says he understands the industry position and calls on President Clinton and Congress to convene new negotiations.

And lest we forget what this is all about, the WP reports that a study in today's New England Journal of Medicine suggests that non-smokers not only live longer, but have less sickness and dependence on others in their last years.

The WSJ and WP each run stories describing a new study purporting to show that the differences between black and white investors are considerable. Among those with incomes above \$50,000, only 57 percent of the blacks had money in the stock market, compared to 81 percent of the whites. And while only 13 percent of the whites believed Social Security will provide at least half their retirement income, 25 percent of blacks thought this.

The NYT front reports that President Clinton has ordered the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice to devise plans for the arrest and trial of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge leader responsible for the death of perhaps a million Cambodians in the 1970s. According to the paper, the opportunity presents itself because the Khmer Rouge, which has Pol Pot under house arrest, is in complete disarray.

Hmmm....wonder if the Khmer Rouge subscribes to the Times.

In a NYT op-ed, Andrew Sullivan assesses the career thus far of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Sullivan notes that under the policy, discharges of homosexuals have increased 67 percent (80 percent if you figure in downsizing). Bill Clinton, Sullivan observes, has now fired more homosexuals than any other employer in America.

The front page of the NYT national edition brings word that, buoyed by the soaring approval ratings of the sex-scandalized Bill Clinton, the sex-scandalized Bob Packwood wants to get back in the game. He's thinking about running for the Oregon state legislature. "Today's Papers" has just the campaign slogan for him: "Still Packing Wood."

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