

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

August 23, 1996

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
DURING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF FOOD AND DRUG
ADMINISTRATION RULE ON CHILDREN AND TOBACCO

The Rose Garden

1:52 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you, Linda, for your courage and your commitment to carry on Victor's legacy and your own crusade. Thank you, Mr. Vice President, Secretary Shalala, General McCaffrey. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Commissioner Kessler and to Phil Lee, the Assistant Secretary of HHS. In different ways they have a great triumph today. Thank you, Dick Durbin, for being the first member of Congress ever to talk to me about this issue. Thank you, Marty Meehan. Thank you to my former colleagues, the Attorneys General. Mr. Kelly, I know you're retiring this year as the Senior Attorney General of America, and we served together back in the dark ages and I can't imagine a more fitting capstone to your career than the fact that you've been a part of this and we thank you. Thank you, Mark Green.

I thank all the medical professionals who are here. I thank all the young people who are here, including Anna Santiago and Neal Stewart McSpadden, who came out here with us. I want to say a special word of thanks to three members of Congress who are not here, but who deserve to be because of their work on this issue -- Senator Lautenberg of New Jersey, Senator Wellstone of Minnesota, and Congressman Henry Waxman of California. Thank you, Joe Califano, for beating on me about these issues all these years we've been friends and long before I ever became President. Thank you, sir.
(Laughter.)

Thank you, Dr. Koop, for everything you have done to try to bring some sanity into the health policy of this country. This has been a great week for you -- we had the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill a couple of days ago and this today. Maybe you can design an encore for us over the next month or two. (Laughter.) But you have been a great force for good in this country and we're grateful to you.

If I might, I'd like to say just a couple of personal words to some people who really deserve an enormous amount of credit for this decision. The Vice President was altogether too modest and too restrained, but the first time we began to discuss this was about the time the FDA opened their inquiry. And he looked at me and I looked at him and I said, well, you know what this might lead to? And he said, I certainly hope so. (Laughter.) And I said, well, you know -- I shouldn't say this, this is our private conversation -- I said, you know, it really isn't an accident that nobody else has ever tried to do this. (Laughter.) It's not an accident. This is not going to be one of those freebies, you know. (Laughter.)

And he began to talk about his sister who died of lung cancer, and how much he loved his sister. We've had so many conversations about his sister that -- not just about this, but about her life, the fact that she was one of the very first Peace Corps volunteers -- that I feel almost that I know her personally. And I could see in his eyes this determination to redeem the promise of her wonderful life. And I would also like to thank Nancy Gore Hunger's husband, Frank Hunger, who now serves as our Assistant Attorney

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General for the civil division. Thank you for being here, Frank. I know this is a great day for you.

I'd like to thank my wife, who has been talking to me about this issue for 20 years; and my wonderful daughter, who convinced my mother to quit smoking on her eighth birthday -- something I was never able to do.

So each of us has a personal journey here that has brought us to this point. But today we are here as a nation, to try to help our parents do a better job in raising their children to be strong and healthy and good citizens, and to do our duty in that regard. We've tried to do a lot of things to help our kids over the last four years, and to help parents raise their children. We've worked hard on cultural issues, supporting things like the V-chip and educational television.

We had a big increase in support for anti-drug programs in our schools and for drug treatment. And we vetoed efforts to reduce those, although we should be investing more. We have a zero tolerance policy to keep guns out of school; we're requiring our states to enforce anti-drinking and driving laws; we defended drug testing cases involving student athletes; we've worked to bring order and discipline into our children's lives by encouraging and giving support to communities that try things like community-based curfews and school uniforms and tougher enforcement of truancy laws.

We know, however, that in spite of all the things that are going right in this country -- with the economy up and more jobs, with the crime rate down, with fewer people on welfare and food stamps, dramatically higher percentage of our young children immunized -- that we have continued to see substantial rises in tobacco and drug use among our young people. We know that while the scientific evidence is clearly unclear, children who do smoke cigarettes are much more likely to engage in other risky behavior, including the use of marijuana and cocaine.

So we have to keep pressing forward to deal with these challenges, every one of them. And I want to thank General McCaffrey for being willing to give up his four stars and magnificent campaign to take on the drug fight for America's children and America's future. I thank you, sir.

Today we are taking direct action to protect our children from tobacco and especially the advertising that hooks children on a product. I hear from time to time politicians say that they don't really think advertising has much to do with it. And whenever I hear one say that I say, well, how come we're all spending so much money advertising when we run for office then? (Laughter.) If it's immaterial, let's just pull it all off and see what happens to us. (Laughter.)

Cigarette smoking is the most significant public health problem facing our people. More Americans die every year from smoking related diseases than from AIDS, car accidents, murders, suicides and fires combined. The human cost doesn't begin to calculate the economic costs -- the thing that galvanized the legal claims of the Attorney Generals, the absolutely staggering burdens on the American health care system and on our economy in general.

But make no mistake about it, the human cost is by far the most important issue. For every day, even though it's illegal, 3,000 of our young people start smoking, and 1,000 of them will die earlier than they would otherwise die as a result. The vast majority of people who smoke in America today started when they were teenagers. If they don't start smoking when they're on a schoolyard, it's very likely they never will.

This epidemic is no accident. Children are bombarded daily by massive marketing campaigns that play on their vulnerabilities, their insecurities, their longings to be something in the world. Joe Camel promises that smoking will make you cool. Virginia Slims' models whisper that smoking will help you stay thin. T-shirts and sports sponsorships sends the message that healthy and vigorous people smoke and that smoking is fun.

A year ago this month, we launched a comprehensive strategy to kick tobacco out of the lives of our children. We proposed strong restrictions on advertising, marketing and sales of cigarettes to children. In the year that followed, the FDA received a torrent of comments from the public -- more than 700,000 -- by far the largest outpouring of public response in the FDA's history. The FDA has heard from doctors, scientists, tobacco companies and tens of thousands of children. We have carefully considered the evidence. It is clear that the action being taken today is the right thing to do, scientifically, legally, and morally.

So today we are acting. First, young people will have to prove their age with an ID to buy cigarettes. Second, cigarette vending machines will be banned from anywhere children and teenagers can go. Third, children will be free of tobacco advertising on billboards near their schools and playgrounds, and billboards in other locations will be restricted to black and white, text only messages. Fourth, if a tobacco ad is in a publication children and teenagers are likely to read, it also has to be black and white with no pictures. Fifth, companies will no longer be permitted to target young people with marketing gimmicks like T-shirts and gym bags. Sixth, cigarette companies may no longer use brand names to sponsor tennis tournaments, auto races and other sporting events.

Finally, the FDA will soon take steps to require the tobacco industry to educate our children about the real dangers of smoking. There is abundant evidence of both these troubling trends that a lot of young people simply don't believe there's any risks to their health.

With this historic action we are taking today Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man will be out of our children's reach forever. (Applause.)

I want to be clear -- we've said it before, let's say it again -- cigarettes are a legal product for adults. They have a perfect right to decide whether to smoke. There are many, many good people who have been farming, growing tobacco for generations in their families. They have a right to make a living for themselves and their families, and they will continue to do so. But let's be honest: We hope that over the long run, if we can dramatically reduce rates of smoking among children, the overall consumption of cigarettes will decline. If that happens, these good people who farmed the land and worked hard should not be left behind. And all of us who have sought this course have a responsibility to help them if they face difficulties. (Applause.)

The cigarette companies still have a right to market their products to adults. But today we are drawing the line on children, fulfilling our obligation as adults to protect them from influences that too often are stronger than they are.

As I said before, I want to say again, this action is a tribute to so many of you who are here today. To the parents, the teachers, the doctors, the public officials. Dr. Bristow, I particularly want to commend the AMA for its writings in its journal, its relentless efforts to educate the American people through the physicians of this country. But I'd like to pay special tribute to the children of America who have joined this crusade, who have organized and led a massive grass-roots movement throughout America

to educate and inform people about the dangers of tobacco smoking for children.

They've staged teach-ins and "Kick Butts" days all across the country. They have used positive peer pressure on people who could care less what a lot of us old fogies think to teach their fellow students that smoking is not cool. So I want to thank these children for the work they have done to save their generation. (Applause.)

A lot of the work we do around here we know will only be fully manifest in people's lives in the future. We know we can't guarantee the success of any individual or family, but we have to guarantee them the tools and conditions that will enable them to make the most of their own lives. Today we take a real step to make sure that they have those lives in full measure. We have today met our responsibility to help our country protect its values, protect its children, and ensure its future.

Thank you all for what you've done. (Applause.)

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2:07 P.M. EDT

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