

Talking Points on Tobacco Settlement Talks

- o The Administration is closely monitoring the settlement talks among the tobacco industry, state attorneys general, public health groups, and private lawyers. Any agreement would have to be passed by the Congress and signed by the President.
- o We will carefully review any settlement that emerges from the discussions, and we will seek the advice of the public health community. As the President has said, in reviewing any settlement proposal, our focus will stay squarely on protecting kids and the public health.

Q. Is the Administration trying to help close the deal?

- A. Absolutely not. The Administration is monitoring the talks closely, so that the President will be in a position to evaluate and respond to any possible settlement. But the Administration has not yet reached a judgment on the kind of settlement the parties appear to be discussing and is not trying to encourage or close the deal.

Q. Have you started to review the deal?

- A. We have begun a process for reviewing the provisions that have been under discussion. We expect to spend the next couple of weeks analyzing the details as they emerge, and consulting with the public health community and others.

Q. How will the review work and how long will it take?

- A. A number of the Federal agencies have a role in tobacco, so we will coordinate the review out of the White House. We will take as long as we need to take, but we will seek to work promptly and expeditiously.

Q. Dr. Kessler and Dr. Koop have asked in a letter to the President that you give them 30 days to complete their own review before the President signs off on anything. Are you going to wait?

- A. The President has made clear that we would very closely consider the views of the public health community prior to rendering any judgment on a settlement, but we've been in contact with members of the community during the whole course of these discussions. We are not going to act before we know the views of the public health community, including Dr. Koop and Dr. Kessler, but we have not decided on any particular timetable.

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Questions on Tobacco Settlement Talks

Q. How does the judge's decision affect the Administration's interest in a settlement?

A. I have no idea. Today, we should focus on this ruling. [Go to statement on ruling].

Q. Isn't the Administration deeply involved in settlement talks?

A. Like other parties interested in this issue, we have been monitoring the talks. We have a deep interest in protecting kids and the public health.

Follow-up

Q. But papers have reported that Bruce Lindsey is intimately involved in the settlement talks.

A. My staff are staying informed of the talks, but we are not a party in the talks. My only interest is in protecting kids and the public health.

Q: Would you support a settlement that gives tobacco companies immunity?

A: I'm not in any position to judge any settlement. But, I'll say this: everybody agrees that blanket immunity is out of the question. As I've said, my only interest is in protecting kids and the public's health. We have to do right by them.

Follow-up

Q: Then, what form of immunity would you support?

A: I'm not going to speculate on what the participants in the negotiations might agree to. My Administration proposed the toughest measures ever to protect children from tobacco, and I am going to fight to see that those restrictions take effect. I'm not going to agree to anything with respect to tobacco that jeopardizes the public health. Our focus will stay on protecting kids and the public health.

Follow-up

Q: Anti-tobacco advocates -- including former FDA Commissioner David Kessler -- held a press conference yesterday saying immunity should be off the table altogether. Do you disagree?

A: I have tremendous respect for Dr. Kessler on this issue. Again, I'm not going to support anything that jeopardizes the public health.

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