

to tobacco meeting

TOPIC:	MEETING WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS ON TOBACCO
DATE:	OCTOBER 1, 1997
LOCATION:	DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOM
TIME:	11:15 a.m.
FROM:	BRUCE REED JOHN HILLEY

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this meeting is to (1) set a bipartisan tone with Congress and (2) emphasize that tobacco legislation should be a top priority for the coming year.

II. BACKGROUND

The Administration is in a strong position to push tobacco legislation through Congress over the next year. Your announcement earlier this month united the public health community for the first time and attracted bipartisan support from the nation's attorneys general and many members of Congress. The plan you described is simple and clear, and should command substantial public support-- and our main adversary, the tobacco industry, should ultimately accede to our demands.

Nevertheless, any tobacco bill will have to make its way through a tangle of overlapping committee jurisdictions and agendas. At least six committees in the Senate and four in the House can lay claim to some piece of this legislation, and dozens of members in both parties have a longstanding interest in tobacco from the standpoint of reducing teen smoking or protecting tobacco farmers. Republicans in particular recognize the political potency of the President's plan, and are very nervous about being trapped into the appearance of defending the industry.

The first step must therefore be to reassure the leadership and key committee chairs like Rep. Bliley that the Administration is indeed serious about passing a bipartisan bill, and not just looking to sandbag them in an election year. The meeting with Congressional leaders, committee chairs, and ranking members is therefore an important opportunity to set the right tone from the outset: you are eager to work together to pass bipartisan legislation as early as possible next year, and we are ready to work in a collaborative fashion to get it done.

Our next step should be for representatives of the Administration, (including Secretary Shalala, Secretary Glickman, John Hilley, and Bruce Reed), to meet with the key players in both parties over the remaining weeks of this session, to offer the Administration's expertise and to try

to marshal bipartisan coalitions in both houses to prepare bills for introduction in January. It is too early to tell which members are in the best position to lead that effort. (Bliley is the key House Republican, Waxman and Fazio are important House Democrats; Hatch, Lugar, McCain, Jeffords, Mack, Campbell and several Republican moderates may be helpful in the Senate; Conrad, Lautenberg, Kennedy, and others are strong Senate Democrats). Ideally, we can lay the ground work for a center-out coalition in the Senate, along the lines of Hatch-Kennedy or the Breaux-Chafee group, and work closely with Bliley, Waxman, and others in the House.

Senate committees have already held several hearings on tobacco over the past three months. Secretary Shalala testified before Jeffords' committee last week. The House may hold hearings in November-December after adjournment.

The goal should be to forge a bipartisan vehicle you can endorse in January, and to make that the central focus of next years' State of the Union.

Opponents of the legislation will make three types of arguments to slow it down. First, Nickles and others have criticized the Administration for failing to submit full legislative language to Congress and blamed the Administration for any delay in passage of a bill. Second, some will use the complexity of the issue as an excuse to go slow, eventually permitting perhaps only restricted portions of a bill to advance following lengthy hearings. Finally, opponents of legislation may focus on flashpoints such as farmers, restrictions on class action suits, or legal fees.

The Administration has a number of arguments to deploy in response to these expected attacks. The strongest argument is to raise above partisan bickering, and stress the urgency of solutions that will protect America's children. In addition, you have a strong history of leadership on smoking issues and can draw upon public support in future disagreements with Congress.

III. PARTICIPANTS

To be Added.

IV. PRESS PLAN

The meeting is closed to the press. The members of Congress will have an opportunity to meet the press outside the White House following the event.

VI. REMARKS

WELCOME

* I want to welcome all of you to the White House, and thank you for coming to talk about this vital issue for America's future. (Acknowledge 4 senior members of Senate, and House by name.) This is an issue that touches on many aspects of American life-- our health, our economy, our laws, and our children-- and I want to acknowledge the hard work of so many of you in this room on this issue. In particular, I want to thank the Vice-president for his very important contribution ~~work~~. You are all here because of the critical role you will play as we work to pass



legislation together. It is complicated, but I'm confident we can put politics aside and get this done.

PURPOSE

* You and I are here because this is a crucial issue for America's future. Three thousand kids start smoking everyday, it shortens the lives of one thousand of them. As I've said before, this is not about money, and it shouldn't be about politics. It should be about trying to reduce this problem of youth smoking.

* Two weeks ago, I outlined the most significant elements I thought should be contained in a bill. First, that we should reduce teen smoking with tougher penalties, that we shouldn't hamstring FDA authority to regulate tobacco, that there should be some changes in the way tobacco is marketed, that we need to make more progress on other health goals like second hand smoke. Finally, and this is ~~very important~~ to me, we need to protect farmers and their communities. This bill can't devastate those communities. They must be protected.

TIMING GOALS

* This is ~~very important~~ to me, I'm going to put it at the top of my agenda for the next year, and I hope you will join me.

WORKING TOGETHER

* This bill will go through many committees and it affects many people and many states. It is not going to happen by fiat, but after you hold hearings, and work through the difficulties of legislation. And I'm sure we will have our differences. But this is too important for us not to get done. And it can't wait until we all agree on every word. We should work together and try to move ahead.

* I've put out my principles. What I think should be a new law. I'm pledging the Administration to provide whatever technical support, drafting support, we can, as you attempt to do your job and put this into legislative language.

* But I asked you here not just to tell you what I think about the issue but to hear what you think - how we can work together, how we can get this done. So I'll ask Vice-President Gore to give some of his thoughts, and I'd like to hear what directions you are going to take on tobacco legislation, where the problems might be and how we can work together.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Why don't you submit legislation on tobacco?

A. I'm happy to be of whatever technical help I can be in helping Congress draft legislation. I don't think there is any doubt where I stand. The five principles I set out are very clear. There is an argument both ways on whether submitting legislation would make this a more efficient bipartisan enterprise or not. It didn't seem to work on health care. I am not about playing the blame game here. I think members should introduce legislation, hold hearings and move for votes and I will play as constructive a role as possible.

Q. When should a bill pass?

A. It is at the top of my agenda for this year. There is nothing more important than saving thousands of children from taking up smoking. Three thousand are starting everyday.

Q. Will negotiations include industry?

A. The industry is a piece of this, but there isn't a need to negotiate with them.

Q. What is the role of the VPOTUS?

A. VPOTUS will take a leadership role in the legislation.

Q. Will you support limits on liability?

A.