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# Medical News

## & INTERNATIONAL REPORT

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### An American Tragedy

EVENTS, HERE AND ABROAD, reflect our tragic governmental schizophrenia in respect to cigarette smoking.

In the United States, Representative John Moss may need a Congressional subpoena to get data on the efforts of cigarette companies to habituate American teenagers to cigarettes—a clearly established carcinogen. At the same time, our government is spending, according to one report, \$600 million to subsidize tobacco crops and promote cigarette sales. The beneficiaries of this largesse, the cigarette companies, are trying to prevent HEW from spending a mere \$20 million to try to cut down the tragedy of lung cancer and heart disease associated with cigarette smoking. A spokesman for the tobacco industry told columnist Jack Anderson that tobacco companies “are not in favor of having HEW use taxpayers’ money for its propaganda campaign.” It would appear they have no compunction about taking your taxes, and ours, to support tobacco crops and tobacco sales.

Abroad, we note a fascinating event. A recent international conference was marked by two relevant, unprecedented events—the U.S. delegation to the World Health Assembly in Geneva was for the first time officially headed by a Secretary of HEW, Joseph A. Califano, Jr. At this meeting a proposal was made by the Saudi Arabian delegation to urge member countries to raise taxes on cigarettes and to increase bans on cigarette advertising in an effort to restrict smoking and its crippling and deadly consequences. Our delegation expressed reservations. While paying lip

service to the resolution, the U.S. representatives stated that “some of the measures called for...go beyond the limits of the present policy of the U.S. government, and even (the U.S.) Constitution.” Our weaseling at the World Health Assembly was put into proper perspective by a comment made by White House Adviser George O’Keefe, a statement worthy for its irony. The spokesman for this administration, which claims to herald a new day in our political life, one free of rhetoric and double talk, of less bureaucracy and less amenability to big business lobbies, was quick to proclaim the Constitutional right of newspapers to accept cigarette advertising and suggested, in the face of increasing governmental limitations on advertising of medicinal and therapeutic procedures, that when it comes to cigarette advertising restrictions, this touches on “the question of freedom of the press.”

What an obscenity to call upon the American Constitution to try to support those seeking to addict young people to a dangerous addicting substance which has brought the tragedies of cancer and heart disease to so many American families. What hypocrisy to ask at the very same time for more restrictive regulations on the actions of physicians and the use of their medicines as they fight against these and other deadly diseases.

In essence, America has no honest, decent, consistent, scientific health policy—and its absence and our governmental actions constitute an American tragedy.

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