



John R. Seffrin, PhD
Chief Executive Officer

October 12, 2006

Regents of the University of California
Office of the Secretary
1111 Franklin Street, 12th floor
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: Tobacco Industry Funding for Academic Research

Dear Regents:

I was heartened to learn that the Board of Regents is considering a policy that, if approved, would prohibit tobacco industry sponsorship of research across the entire University of California System. I appreciate the gravity of this issue, having participated last year in similar deliberations with the Board of Directors of the American Cancer Society regarding whether to approve a policy that would proscribe grants to scientific investigators or health professionals who are funded by the tobacco industry. The discussion was especially weighty, because the Society, like a University, cherishes freedom of inquiry, and is reluctant to oppose any source of funding for legitimate scientific research. Although the Society has not itself accepted funding of any kind from the tobacco industry for many years, the Board recognized the potential ramifications of extending this policy to our grantees.

Several issues proved to be especially critical in our Board's deliberations. First is that the tobacco industry has exerted a corrupting influence on biomedical research for at least 40 years. The Industry is not an honest partner in research. Entities such as the Tobacco Institute, the Counsel for Tobacco Research and the Center for Indoor Air Research were jointly created and funded by tobacco companies to create the appearance of scientific legitimacy and independence while deceiving the public about the adverse health effects of tobacco smoking and second hand smoke. These entities are essential to a sophisticated public relations campaign that seeks to buy credibility while recruiting a coterie of "expert" witnesses who create the appearance of scientific controversy long after genuine scientific controversy has ended. On the one hand, the tobacco industry funds some meritorious studies of basic disease processes. This research lends scientific credibility to the program while sidestepping the risks and harms caused by smoking. On the other hand, the industry funds scientifically inferior proposals that could never survive legitimate peer review. Results from these studies are then selectively publicized as part of industry campaigns to deny the addictiveness and extraordinary harm caused by active smoking and secondhand smoke, and to attack legitimate research findings.

A second critical issue concerns whether or not academic freedom protects the "right" of University faculty to obtain research funding wherever possible. Our Board recognized that the purpose of academic freedom is to protect the discovery and dissemination of knowledge from political, economic, or other repression. Consequently, the efforts of the tobacco industry to manipulate and distort scientific research for economic gain are the antithesis of the goals of academic freedom.

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A third concern addressed by our Board was whether a specific policy prohibiting research sponsorship by the tobacco industry would put the Society on a “slippery slope”, releasing a profusion of similar demands to restrict funding from other industries or special interests. This has not been the case. No other legal industry produces an addictive product that kills approximately half of its long-term consumers when used as directed. The tobacco industry is unparalleled with respect to its devastating health effects, the aggressiveness with which it promotes its products globally, and its long and continuing history of obfuscation. The extent of the harm is itself difficult to comprehend. Tobacco smoking is estimated to have killed one hundred million people in the 20th century; if current trends continue, it is projected to kill one billion people in this century. Marketing tobacco products is antithetical to social responsibility

Finally, our Board was aware of at least two occasions in which the Society experienced first hand the extent to which the tobacco industry will misrepresent scientific evidence in order to deny the harmful effects of active smoking and second hand smoke and to subvert efforts to prevent exposure. In one instance occasion, the Tobacco Institute obtained two large American Cancer Society datasets by subpoena, purportedly to use in defending the companies in lawsuits about active smoking. The Industry then contracted with the consulting firm of LeVois and Layard in San Francisco to examine the health consequences of second hand smoke. The analyses were conducted in such a manner to obscure the increased risk of coronary heart disease in non-smoking individuals exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. The Tobacco Institute then publicized the misleading results throughout the U.S., with the false implication that they were endorsed by the Society, wherever communities were considering prohibiting smoking in public places. The second instance involved analyses lead by Dr. James Enstrom of UCLA, who misled long term colleagues at the Society by failing to mention to the Society that he had applied for and received funding from Philip Morris, and who ignored multiple communications about fundamental methodological problems with his analyses. Although the decision currently before the Regents is much broader than any individual case of scientific misconduct, the Society could provide additional documentation of scientific misconduct, if this is helpful.

Given these issues, I am proud that our Board of Directors voted unanimously not to fund scientific investigators or health professionals who accept research funding from the tobacco industry. I hope that your debate will lead you to a similar conclusion. I have enormous respect for your institution and fully recognize the impact that your leadership will have on other Universities, here and worldwide.

Sincerely,



John R. Seffrin, PhD

JRS/jn

cc: Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante
Robert Dynes, PhD, President
John Oakley, LLD, Chair, Academic Senate