

and pass it now. Let me also say that I believe the presence of the young people here and their active support of the Tobacco-Free Kids movement is absolutely critical. There are still cynics who say, "Well, this is not the kind of problem that requires this sort of solution. After all, nobody forces these people to start smoking." The young people here wearing their T-shirts, willing to look into the eyes of the lawmakers, are a stunning rebuke to that kind of cynicism. I thank them for saying no to tobacco and yes to their own bright futures.

And I want to tell you that you may well be able to have a bigger impact on Capitol Hill than all the things that we say here in the White House on the remaining undecided voters. Our lawmakers must not let this historic opportunity slip away under pressure from big tobacco lobbying. I want you to go and see them. I know you're going to Capitol Hill. When you're up there, I want you to ask every Member of Congress to go home tonight and think about how they can look you in the eye and say no to your future.

We now know from the release of previously classified documents that for years the tobacco companies looked on you as, and I quote, "the replacement smokers" of the 21st century. But here we have more than 1,000 unique children who cannot be replaced, the scientists, the artists, the teachers, the Olympic champions, the engineers, the leaders, perhaps a future President in the 21st century. The rest of us have an obligation to see that these children and all their counterparts in every community in our country have a chance to grow and live to the fullest of their God-given abilities.

That is what this bill is all about. This is more than just another bill in the legislature. This is more than a culmination of a historic fight between powerful political forces. We have no higher obligation than to give the young people we see here today the brightest, best future we possible can. That's what this bill is about, and we must pass it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Tara Lipinski, Olympic figure skating gold medalist; Emily Broxterman, 1997 mid-

west regional winner, Youth Advocate of the Year Award; and civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson.

### **Letter to Congressional Leaders on Proposed Tobacco Legislation**

*May 20, 1998*

*Dear Mr. Leader:*

I applaud the Senate for taking up comprehensive, bipartisan legislation to dramatically reduce teen smoking. Every day, 3000 teenagers start smoking regularly, and 1000 will die prematurely of smoking-related diseases as a result. I urge the Senate to move swiftly to pass comprehensive legislation that could save those children's lives.

Last September, and in my budget plan, I set forth five principles for comprehensive tobacco legislation:

- Raising the price of cigarettes by \$1.10 a pack over 5 years with additional surcharges on companies that continue to sell to kids;
- Affirming the FDA's full authority to regulate tobacco products;
- Getting companies out of the business of marketing and selling tobacco to minors;
- Promoting public health research and public health goals; and
- Protecting our tobacco farmers and their communities.

I have made protecting tobacco farmers and farming communities a top priority for this legislation, and I believe Senator Ford's LEAF Act fully meets this standard. I am deeply troubled by the Senate Leadership's recent attempt to undermine protection for tobacco farmers and their communities. I urge the Senate to work through this impasse and ensure that small, family farmers are protected.

If that issue can be resolved to my satisfaction, the bill before the Senate, as amended by Senator McCain's Manager's Amendment, is a good, strong bill that will make a real dent in teen smoking. Congress should pass it without delay.

I applaud Senator McCain and others in both parties who have worked hard to strengthen this legislation. I am particularly

pleased that the bill contains significant improvements which will help reduce youth smoking and protect the public health:

- Tough industry-wide and company-specific lookback surcharges that will finally make reducing youth smoking the tobacco companies' bottom line;
- Protection for all Americans from the health hazards of secondhand smoke;
- No antitrust exemption for the tobacco industry;
- Strong licensing and anti-smuggling provisions to prevent the emergence of contraband markets and to prosecute violators;
- A dedicated fund to provide for a substantial increase in health research funding, a demonstration to test promising new cancer treatments, a nationwide counteradvertising campaign to reduce youth smoking, effective state and local programs in tobacco education, prevention, and cessation, law enforcement efforts to prevent smuggling and crack-down on retailers who sell tobacco products to children, assistance for tobacco farmers and their communities, and funds for the states to make additional efforts to promote public health and protect children; and
- The elimination of immunity for parent companies of tobacco manufacturers, an increase in the cap on legal damages to \$8 billion per year, and changes to ensure that the cap will be available only to tobacco companies that change the way they do business, by agreeing to accept sweeping restrictions on advertising, continue making annual payments and lookback surcharges even if those provisions are struck down, make substantial progress toward meeting the youth smoking reduction targets, prevent their top management from taking part in any scheme to promote smuggling, and abide by the terms of the legislation rather than challenging it in court. Because the First Amendment limits what we can do to stop the tobacco companies' harmful advertising practices—which lure so many young people to start smoking—we can do far more to achieve our goal of reducing

youth smoking if the companies cooperate instead of tying us up in court for decades. If a cap that doesn't prevent anybody from suing the companies and getting whatever damages a jury awards will get tobacco companies to stop marketing cigarettes to kids, it is well worth it for the American people. I, therefore, oppose the Gregg Amendment to strike the liability cap.

I strongly support these improvements, and I urge the Senate to pass this legislation without delay.

Sincerely,

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Trent Lott, Senate majority leader, and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

### **Radio Remarks on Cuban Independence Day**

*May 20, 1998*

I want to say hello to all listeners of Radio Marti. On behalf of the people of the United States, I offer you warmest wishes on this Cuban Independence Day.

The United States is determined to help Cuba achieve a peaceful transition to democracy. And as part of our effort, I announced in March that the U.S. would permit direct humanitarian flights, transfers of money from families in the United States to relatives in Cuba, and streamline procedures for the sale of medicines to your country.

These steps are aimed at building on Pope John Paul's historic visit to Cuba, increasing humanitarian relief and supporting the role of the church and other elements of civil society. We're committed to helping Cuba's courageous democracy and human rights advocates as they work for a brighter future. We continue to be concerned about those who languish in Cuban jails. We urge the Cuban Government to release all political prisoners and reintegrate them into Cuban society.

Cubans will never be free until Cubans are free to speak out and organize for fundamental change. We send you a message of hope; we must work together to promote freedom