

Statement on Senate Passage of Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Legislation

June 11, 2009

Today the Senate passed the “Family Smoking and Tobacco Control Act,” which has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress. Once the legislation is returned to the House for final passage, it will make history by giving the scientists and medical experts at the FDA the power to take sensible steps that will reduce tobacco’s harmful effects and prevent tobacco companies from marketing their products to children.

Each year, Americans pay nearly \$100 billion in added health care costs due to smoking. Each day, about 1,000 young people under the

age of 18 become regular smokers. And at any given moment, millions are struggling with their habit or worrying about loved ones who smoke. My administration is committed to protecting our children and reforming our health care system, and moving forward with commonsense tobacco control measures is an integral part of that process. I look forward to signing this bill into law and to working with HHS Secretary Sebelius and FDA Commissioner Hamburg on its implementation.

NOTE: The statement referred to H.R. 1256.

Remarks on Congressional Passage of Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

June 12, 2009

The President. Good afternoon. I just wanted to give a quick statement about the kids tobacco legislation that passed the Senate yesterday.

This bill has obviously been a long time coming. We’ve known for years, even decades, about the harmful, addictive, and often deadly effects of tobacco products. Each year, Americans pay nearly \$100 billion in added health care costs due to smoking. Each day, about a thousand young people under the age of 18 become regular smokers.

For over a decade, leaders of both parties have fought to prevent tobacco companies from marketing their products to children and provide the public with the information they need to understand what a dangerous habit this is. And after a decade of opposition, all of us are finally about to achieve the victory with this bill, a bill that truly defines change in Washington.

I’m proud that the House and the Senate have acted swiftly and in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion to pass this legislation that will protect our kids and improve our public health. Along with legislation to protect credit card owners from unfair rate hikes, homeown-

ers from mortgage fraud and abuse, and taxpayers from wasteful defense spending, this kids tobacco bill would be the fourth piece of bipartisan legislation that I’ve signed into law over the last month that protects the American consumer and changes the way Washington works and who Washington works for.

So I look forward to signing it. I want to thank all the people in the House and the Senate for working so hard to pass this bill in a bipartisan way. And I want to give a special shout-out to my legislative director, Phil Schiliro. He and his team have just done an outstanding job. They’ve been working on this for a long time, even before they joined the administration. I’m really proud of them.

All right. Thanks, guys. Have a great weekend.

Election in Iran

Q. Mr. President, how closely are you watching the Iranian elections? How critical is it to change?

The President. We are excited to see what appears to be a robust debate taking place in Iran. And obviously, after the speech that I

made in Cairo, we tried to send a clear message that we think there is the possibility of change. And ultimately, the election is for the Iranians to decide. But just as has been true in Lebanon, what can be true in Iran, as well, is that you're seeing people looking at new possibilities. And whoever ends up winning the election in Iran, the fact that there's been a robust debate, hope-

fully, will help advance our ability to engage them in new ways.

All right? Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs Philip M. Schiliro. The President also referred to H.R. 1256.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe *June 12, 2009*

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Tsvangirai to the Oval Office. He and his delegation have been meeting with my team throughout the day. I, obviously, have extraordinary admiration for the courage and the tenacity that the Prime Minister has shown in navigating through some very difficult political times in Zimbabwe.

There was a time when Zimbabwe was the bread basket of Africa and continues to have enormous potential. It has gone through a very dark and difficult period politically. The President—President Mugabe, I think I've made my views clear, has not acted oftentimes in the best interest of the Zimbabwean people and has been resistant to the kinds of democratic changes that need to take place.

We now have a power-sharing agreement that shows promise, and we want to do everything we can to encourage the kinds of improvement not only on human rights and rule of law, freedom of the press, and democracy that is so necessary, but also on the economic front. The people of Zimbabwe need very concrete things: schools that are reopened; a health care delivery system that can deal with issues like cholera or HIV/AIDS; an agricultural system that is able to feed its people. And on all these fronts, I think the Prime Minister is committed to significant concrete improvement in the day-to-day lives of the people of Zimbabwe.

I congratulate him; they've been able to bring inflation under control after hyperinflation that was really tearing at the fabric of the economy. We're starting to see, slowly, some improvements in capacity—industrial capacity

there. So overall, in a very difficult circumstance, we've seen progress from the Prime Minister.

We are grateful to him. We want to encourage him to continue to make progress. The United States is a friend to the people of Zimbabwe. I've committed \$73 million in assistance to Zimbabwe. It will not be going through the Government directly because we continue to be concerned about consolidating democracy, human rights, and rule of law, but it will be going directly to the people in Zimbabwe, and I think can be of assistance to the Prime Minister in his efforts. He's going to continue to provide us with direction in ways that he thinks we can be helpful. And I'm grateful to him for his leadership, for his courage, and I'm looking forward to being a partner with him in the years to come.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for receiving us. I'm sure that—I want to take the opportunity of congratulating you, although belatedly, for being elected the President. And I think it's a profound experience for some of us who are committed to change, and hopefully that—the Prime Minister, who is committed to change, and the President, who is committed to change, find common convergence in position.

I've been explaining to the President that Zimbabwe is coming out of a political conflict and economic collapse or decay, and that the new political dispensation we have crafted is an attempt to arrest this decay. But also mindful of the fact that it is a journey; this is a transitional