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July 20, 2005

University of California Board of Regents
1111 Franklin St., 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Dear Regents:

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights urge the University of California Board of Regents to adopt a policy specifically preventing the acceptance of tobacco research money by all units of the University of California system. Many leading academic institutions around the world have adopted policies declining tobacco industry funding for research. After an extensive debate on this issue, we understand that the Academic Senate adopted the position that any such policy at the University of California should be done on a System-wide basis and that only the Regents had the authority to enact such a policy. The University of California's decision to join other institutions will have rippling effects at academic research institutions throughout the United States and around the world.

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights is a national nonprofit lobbying organization established in 1976 to protect nonsmokers' rights to breathe smokefree air and expose tobacco industry interference with tobacco prevention efforts and smokefree air campaigns. The tobacco industry has a decades long history of using funding of scientific research to create confusion and promote controversy about the effects of smoking and secondhand smoke in order to keep people smoking. These activities were at the core of the fraud claims made by the Attorney General of California in its suit against the tobacco industry as well as the massive Federal RICO case that has been in the news. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Justice featured a tobacco industry funded study of secondhand smoke conducted at UCLA in its closing arguments as an archetypical example of how the industry and its lawyers manipulate and distort the scientific process.

In addition, the tobacco industry has long looked for ways to buy respectability through linkages with reputable institutions like the University of California. Funding academic research is a key way the tobacco industry gains legitimacy. The tobacco companies are continuing to spend vast sums trying to convince a skeptical public that they have changed and no longer condone the deceptive business practices that were pervasive for so long. In fact, very little has changed except a new cast of characters and more effective and sophisticated public relations strategies.



These issue played an important role in the Regents' 2001 decision to divest all University tobacco industry holdings. Since all research funds to the University come in the Regents name, we think it would be logical to extend the decision not to profit from the tobacco industry as stockholders to refuse its money.

We hope the University of California Board of Regents will examine all the facts and make the most prudent decision on whether or not they can comfortably allow acceptance of money from an industry that continues to be responsible for the deaths of more than 400,000 Americans every year. A policy against acceptance of tobacco money would send a strong message that the good name of the University of California cannot be used to gain legitimacy for irresponsible corporate behavior and would be entirely consistent with your 2001 decision on divestiture. To decide otherwise would be a victory for tobacco companies and a blow to the integrity of the University of California.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Hallett, MPH
Executive Director
(UCLA Alumna BA 1987, MPH 1990)