

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 17, 2014

Secretary Robert Gates
President
Boy Scouts of America
1325 West Walnut Hill Lane
Irving, Texas 75015-2079

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write with grave concern about the Boy Scouts of America's ongoing partnership with the Right Decisions Right Now (RDRN) youth tobacco prevention program. We support proven interventions to prevent young people from starting to use nicotine products, which too often leads to a lifetime of addiction fraught with health risks. However, the RDRN program has not proven to be effective. We urge you to reconsider this decision to partner with RDRN and to explore other options for helping prevent young people from becoming addicted to nicotine.

The RDRN program is funded by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. With adult smoking rates down to about 18.1 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco companies have had to be creative about ensuring that they have new customers. Basic economics suggest it is in these companies' best financial interest to attract new smokers. This basic fact should immediately raise red flags about whether they are truly invested in effective methods to prevent or cease smoking.

A wolf in sheep's clothing, big tobacco has a history of using and promoting ineffective prevention and education programs. Indeed, this RDRN program was one of several described as such a program in a federal court opinion.¹ Evidence from the vast amount of research into scientifically proven methods of preventing youth smoking clearly demonstrates that programs such as the RDRN are little more than PR campaigns designed to make it look like tobacco companies have turned over a new leaf and are no longer targeting their products to children.

Further, although the website describing the RDRN program has been updated to suggest there is some benefit to adults who stop smoking, there are no provisions in this program to educate older students. Finally, this program fails to emphasize the increased rate of death from smoking – both serious concerns that were raised in the final federal court opinion. Yet, R.J. Reynolds continues to promote their program, selectively using some CDC data in some of their materials to suggest legitimacy while downplaying even more damaging findings, such as the fact that cigarette smoking accounts for one in every five deaths each year. The Boy Scouts of America's partnership with the program, which has already resulted in about 12,000 scouts

¹ *United States v. Philip Morris USA, Inc.*, No. 99-CV-02496GK (D.D.C. Aug. 17, 2006).

taking R.J. Reynolds's "pledge,"² further serves to legitimize the disingenuous efforts of big tobacco.

We urge you to work with public health advocates about more effective steps you could take to discourage boy scouts from smoking than the ineffective RDRN program. The Research-Tested Intervention Programs database³ from the National Cancer Institute offers examples of research-tested programs and the National Institute on Drug Abuse's Mind Over Matter—Tobacco Addiction materials⁴ can provide the Boy Scouts with more effective educational materials related to tobacco prevention education. Better options exist, and we fear that promoting the RDRN program could set us back decades in the fight against youth smoking. Please immediately end your partnership with R.J. Reynolds and eliminate the new patch you have created for scouts who have completed the program. The Boy Scouts, and all American youth, deserve more than a PR campaign.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate



TOM HARKIN
United States Senate

² "Youth Tobacco Prevention," Reynolds American, Accessed October 30, 2014.

<http://reynoldsamerican.com/youth-tobacco-prevention.cfm?plank=YouthTobaccoPrevention5>

³ "Mind Over Matter Teaching Guide and Series," National Institute on Drug Abuse, Accessed on November 13, 2014. https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&es_th=1&ie=UTF-8#sourceid=chrome-psyapi2&es_th=1&ie=UTF-8&q=NIDA

⁴ "Research-tested Intervention Programs," National Cancer Institute, Accessed November 13, 2014.

<http://rtips.cancer.gov/rtips/index.do>