

Puff vs. No-Puff square off in smoke ring



Photo by Jon Martella, Chronicle Staff

Connie Drath, assistant to the president of the Tobacco Institute, was in Houston last week to present the tobacco industry's side of the smoking versus anti-smoking issue.

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THE ISSUE: smoking

The contenders:
• Joseph Califano, a reformed three-cigarette-pack-a-day man and secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Carter administration.

• The Tobacco Institute, represented by non-smoker Connie Drath, who is assistant to the president of the institute.

The battle stripes are drawn. And the two sides are, as always, evenly divided between those who think government should take an active step in educating people about the potential hazards of smoking and those who think government has its arms in too many societal pleas already.

Califano made his position clear on Jan. 10 when he announced that his office, HEW, would spearhead a beefed-up government advertising campaign to discourage smoking Americans from committing "slow-motion suicide."

This week, Connie Drath was in Houston and said that the Tobacco Institute feels the other side of the argument should be heard. She says that the institute doesn't advise that anyone begin or refrain from smoking and that the organization is not a promotional group.

She says that anti-smoking attitudes are nothing new.

"In 1604, King James of England wrote a paper called 'Counterblaste.' He charged that 'that evil weed was a loathsome hazard' to lungs and to eyes. Smoking was so controversial in the 1600s that the Russian czar said anyone caught smoking would be whipped for the first offense and executed for the second offense. The point is that smoking has always been controversial."

One of the biggest items of contention and disagreement is the governmental financing of tobacco crops.

Califano said in a Jan. 1

announcement that the tobacco industry's "strong lobby — in combination with agricultural interests" has dissuaded efforts to cut government subsidies to tobacco plantations.

Ms. Drath says the tobacco industry takes exception to the term subsidy.

"You often hear that the government is subsidizing the tobacco industry," she said. "The tobacco industry does not receive subsidies. (The anti-smoking people) are talking about price support loans that go to farmers. There are about 600,000 small family farmers in the Southeastern states and the farms are usually operated on one or two acres. Tobacco is a tremendously successful cash crop.

"In 1933, the price support programs were established for a variety of crops — tobacco among them. The loan program guarantees the farmer a minimum price for a crop. It provides an incentive to produce and it also stabilizes the market, as well as limits the product. Each tobacco farmer who signs the agreement has to abide by the quotas that limit the poundage of his crop."

She explains that farmers receive loans through the Commerce Credit Corporation and that any tobacco that isn't sold directly by the farmers is held and stored in government warehouses and resold to foreign buyers.

"At the time the excess tobacco is sold, the loans are paid back to the government plus interest."

Health:

Califano addressed the health issue on Jan. 10 by saying, "Those who ignore these facts (dangers of smoking) are indulging in the most dangerous kind of wishful thinking; they are whistling past the cemetery in their search for a way to rationalize a habit that can become a dangerous dependency."

Ms. Drath says, "Our position on the smoking and health issue is, yes, there are a lot of statistics derived from population studies. There were comparisons made between disease and death rate that resulted in a statistical link or correlation for diseases like lung cancer, heart disease, emphyse-

ma. But there has never been any scientific or laboratory proof that smoking was the cause.

"Smoking has been pinpointed as a 'risk factor,' not a cause. Cigarette smoking is a risk factor. But the fact that you live with a risk factor doesn't mean you will or you won't fall victim to these diseases."

Ms. Drath says that Califano has changed his statistics, too. "Two weeks ago he said 90,000 people have developed lung cancer due to smoking. Two weeks later he changed the figure by 15 percent saying that 78,000 people had developed lung cancer due to smoking. Really, 78,000 people out of 60 million people is a small percentage." (She says 60 million adults smoke, which is 40 percent of the population.)

She adds that the other important factor is that non-smokers also contract lung cancer, heart disease and emphysema. "More smokers get these diseases but they are not confined to smokers."

Teens:

In his Jan. 10 talk (the 14th anniversary of the surgeon general's warning that first gave widespread

attention to the link between smoking and health problems) Califano said that the new anti-smoking government program involves public education, regulation and research. "A main objective is persuading young people not to smoke."



Joseph Califano, secretary of Health, Education and Welfare has launched a new stepped-up anti-smoking campaign.

Ms. Drath says, "He liked about making teens target. The tobacco industry doesn't believe that smoking is for teens. We believe smoking is an adult custom and is something a mature individual should make a decision about. A recent Gallup poll indicates that 90 percent of all teenagers believe smoking is dangerous. So why is the money being spent?"

Money:

Califano announced this month that HEW's smoking information and education programs will be expanded and coordinated by a new Office on Smoking and Health with an annual budget of \$23 million. (Seventeen million dollars of that \$23 million was already budgeted for smoking research and education programs.)

"We have to question the priorities at the department of HEW," said Ms. Drath. "There are any number of serious problems in this country today such as the Medicaid scandals and an almost bankrupt Social Security system. Yet, Mr. Califano has chosen to put those problems on the back burner. We (the tobacco industry) see it as a pursuit of a personal hobby."

She says that time and money is also wasteful. "What (Califano) is saying is a repetition of much activity and information that's been going on for the past 14 years. We have to ask how he can possibly think America hasn't heard the message."

(over)

Personal rights:

Califano has stated, "People have a right with in obvious limits, to eat or drink or smoke whatever they like. But if you have a product like cigarettes that results in premature death of thousands of people every year and adds billions to our national health bill, then people ought to be alerted to that fact."

Obviously, the tobacco industry disagrees. "We say, Enough! Inform us, but don't advise us. Secretary Califano may be crossing into a dangerous area and that is personal freedom."

She agrees that cigarettes smoke might offend a non-smoker.

"There's no doubt about the fact that under certain circumstances and given the improper setting, smoking can be troublesome to non-smokers and smokers alike.

So what's the solution? More government intervention to regulate society? We suggest that people work this problem out among themselves instead of putting the fist of government into the glove of social conscience."

Ms. Drath, who has been a reporter for "The New York Journal of Commerce" and a legislative assistant to Congressman Margaret Heckler (R-Mass.) said, "There is a small group of anti-smokers. I'm not talking about non-smokers. These people — and we include Secretary Califano among them — are on a singular crusade. Ultimately, their goal is prohibition. And they seem to have a creeping prohibition mentality." And the controversy rages. On. And on. And on.