

# Smoke Free News

## Day at the Capitol not the only way to make a difference

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Many thanks to the 38 members of the Four Corners Partnership who participated in the Day at the Capitol on April 7, 2011 (*story on page 2*). They traveled by bus or carpool to St. Paul to meet in person with their state legislators.

We know that many others would have liked to participate in this event, but were not able to attend due to work and other obligations. We've been asked what else people can do to help support our efforts. The good news is that there are ways

everyone can help without ever leaving home.

We are always looking for people who are willing to write a **letter to the editor**. We can provide you with background information and talking points as well as tips for writing an effective letter. If you read about an issue in our newsletter or on our website that you would like to bring to the attention of everyone in your community, just call or e-mail the Four Corners coordinator for your county (*see How To Contact Us - page 4*).

Another way you can make a difference is by responding to one of our **e-mail Action Alerts**. Write or call your state legislators to share your concerns about the topic of the alert. We only send an Action Alert when there is an important matter under active consideration in the Minnesota legislature.

Our lawmakers tell us that personal contacts from their constituents, along with letters to the editor in the newspapers from their districts, really do influence their thinking on many issues.

## Youth oppose effort to weaken retailer penalty for selling tobacco to minors



Wearing t-shirts with the slogan "I'm not a replacement", a group of almost 100 youth from across the state participated in the Day at the Capitol - April 7. Their message was clear: it is never OK to sell tobacco to children.

They are concerned about an effort in the legislature to weaken the penalties for retailers who are caught selling tobacco to youth under age 18. Under Minnesota law, retailers who fail three tobacco compliance checks within a 24-month period are subject to a \$250 fine and a one

week suspension of their license to sell tobacco products. A bill in the legislature this session (HF 962/SF 1079) seeks to waive the license suspension.

Our current law works. Only 15 stores out of nearly 9,000 licensed tobacco retailers had their licenses suspended in 2010 for illegal sales to minors.

Decreasing the penalty to retailers who violate the law would only make it easier for tobacco to end up in the hands of our kids.

## Four Corners Partnership participates in Day at the Capitol - April 7

On April 7, 2011, nearly 400 people gathered in St. Paul for the Day at the Capitol. They came from all parts of Minnesota to ask their legislators to support measures that will reduce the harm caused by tobacco. This event was organized by a broad coalition of Minnesota's leading health and nonprofit organizations. The primary sponsors for the Day at the Capitol were the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association in Minnesota, and ClearWay Minnesota.

The day started at the Minnesota History Center with a briefing on the issues and advocacy training. This was followed by a rally in the Capitol Rotunda. Then everyone sorted into groups by House District and went to appointments with their state senator and representative.

Each group was tasked with educating their legislators about the harm tobacco causes in our state and about proven solutions that could reduce that harm. Another important assignment was to listen carefully to what their lawmakers had to say and gain a clear understanding of their positions on these three key issues:

### 1. Protect Minnesota's Freedom to Breathe Act

There is an attempt in the legislature this session to weaken our smoke-free law and permit smoking inside bars and restaurants.

### 2. Protect kids from little cigars

Even though they are the same size and shape as cigarettes, have a filter tip and come 20 in a pack, "little cigars" are taxed at a lower rate and often sell for less than half the price of cigarettes. There is a bill in this session of the legislature that will close this loophole (*see page 4*).

### 3. Raise the price of tobacco products

Tobacco kills over 5,000 Minnesotans each year. A \$1.50 per pack increase in the price of cigarettes in Minnesota would keep 60,000 kids from starting to smoke and help 29,000 current smokers to quit.



Nearly 400 advocates from all over Minnesota gathered at the State Capitol on April 7. One of the highlights of the day was a rally in the Rotunda.



Students from the Owatonna High School SHOC (Students Helping Others Choose) program met with Rep. Kory Kath to deliver copies of an open letter addressed to him and Senator Parry asking them to oppose any new exceptions to our smoke-free law.



Senator John Howe hopped on our bus to say good bye. We thanked him for his strong support of Minnesota's smoke-free law.



Rep. Steve Drazkowski met with coalition members from Wanamingo, Kenyon and Zumbrota.

# \$554

The figure \$554 was seen everywhere on buttons and signs during the Day at the Capitol. A recent study showed that treating disease caused by tobacco use cost Minnesota a staggering \$2.87 billion for just one year. Divide this amount by the total population of our state and it works out to an added cost of \$554 per year for every man, woman and child. We have made good progress in Minnesota to reduce the harm caused by tobacco, but clearly there is still a lot of work to be done. We all continue to pay the price for tobacco.



Coalition members from Faribault and Northfield.



Two future legislators from our group were given permission to step inside the House chamber.



Students from the SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) programs at Kasson-Mantorville and Triton high schools met with Senator David Senjem.

## HOW TO CONTACT US

### Goodhue County:

Tom Wolff - (651) 385-6142  
or (800) 950-2142  
e-mail: tom.wolff@co.goodhue.mn.us

### Dodge County:

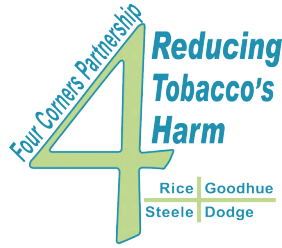
Mary Krebs  
(507) 635-6150  
or (888) 600-5169  
e-mail: mary.krebs@co.dodge.mn.us

### Rice County:

Ellen Unruh - (507) 332-6111 Faribault  
(507) 645-9576 x 6111 Northfield  
e-mail: ellen.unruh@gmail.com

### Steele County:

Jane Nyquist - (507) 444-7661  
e-mail: jane.nyquist@co.steele.mn.us



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## *"Little cigar" bill gains supporter in MN House*

Not all of the activity in April was at the Capitol. Members of the Four Corners Partnership met with Representative Tim Kelly at the Best of Times Bookstore and Café in Red Wing on April 20, 2011.

Due to a last minute schedule change, Representative Kelly was not able to keep his appointment with our group during the Day at the Capitol. While back home during the Legislature's spring recess, he found time in his busy schedule to meet with our group. Many thanks to the seven coalition members who participated in this



meeting on very short notice.

One topic of discussion was the "little cigar" bill (HF 743/SF 493). Currently, "little cigars" are taxed at a lower rate than cigarettes. This bill would broaden the statutory definition of cigarettes to include "little cigars." This will close the loophole in the way these two extremely similar products are taxed and subject "little cigars" to the same taxes and fees as cigarettes.

We shared the results of a recent informal price survey of tobacco retailers in Goodhue County. We found packs of 20 "little cigars" being sold for as little as \$1.89 a pack. Compare this to \$4.50 to \$5.50 for a pack of cigarettes.

Representative Kelly clearly understood that cheap, candy-flavored "little cigars" appeal to youth. He agreed that two such similar products should be taxed the same way. We were all excited to hear Representative Kelly say that he would add himself as an author to the House version of the "little cigar" bill.

## Can you tell the difference?



A "little cigar" is wrapped in brown paper. A cigarette is wrapped in white paper. They are the same size and shape. Both have filter tips and come 20 in a pack. Is there any real difference? Yes!

*"Little cigars" often sell for less than half the price of cigarettes.*

*"Little cigars" come in kid-friendly flavors like sweet grape, sweet strawberry, wild cherry and chocolate.*