

September 26, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Azar:

The undersigned groups, representing millions of taxpayers and consumers across the country, urge the U.S. delegation attending the taxpayer-funded meeting of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), commonly referred to as COP8, to strongly advocate for science-based solutions grounded in U.S. principles and policies.

The FCTC was established by the WHO to develop universal standards to address the health-related challenges associated with smoking cigarettes.

COP8 participants have acknowledged that smoking is the leading changeable behavioral cause of non-communicable diseases. We agree with that assessment and we support efforts to raise awareness of the health risks associated with smoking. We also believe that taxpayer-funded international bodies, like the WHO, should promote all reasonable, science-based responses to help curb cigarette consumption. As part of that effort, the WHO should convene relevant stakeholders, without discrimination, and work collaboratively with them to promote the concept of tobacco harm reduction – the recognition of a continuum of risk in tobacco products. The WHO should also be promoting the continued research and development of innovative products scientifically-substantiated to be of reduced harm as compared to combustible cigarettes. To date, the WHO has failed to adequately recognize that collaboration with all stakeholders and promoting new and innovative products can help reduce the harm associated with smoking cigarettes despite a considerable body of evidence to the contrary. The WHO's position – or inaction – is also despite policies and statements from leading agencies like the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Public Health England, as well as the American Cancer Society.

As organizations also dedicated to sound fiscal policy, we believe it is imperative for public officials to consider the advantages of harm reduction strategies in addressing unsustainable government health expenditures. Recognition of new techniques to encourage cessation of conventional smoking could easily deliver tens of billions of dollars in annual savings among U.S. programs alone, among them Medicaid, Medicare, and veterans' health initiatives. Worldwide, such savings could multiply into the hundreds of billions or more. We contend that these benefits should be the focus of WHO discussions, rather than more of the same misguided schemes to overtax and overregulate products that only encourage bloated government, smuggling, and other undesirable [activities](#).

We are also concerned about the level of transparency at meetings of the WHO. The WHO has been hostile to the press, at times banning press from attending meetings. In fact, in 2016, WHO officials forcibly removed Taxpayers Protection Alliance Senior Fellow Drew Johnson from their COP7 meeting. According to Drew, "When I attempted to do my job of reporting on the meeting, a half dozen guards pulled me out of my

chair and dragged me out of the meeting hall. I was left with bruises on my arms and shoulders from the violent force used to expel me from the ostensibly public meeting.”

Earlier this year, an independent panel of the WHO declined to recommend another round of taxes on sugary drinks during its deliberations on reducing obesity. The lack of consensus with this panel should actually be regarded as a hopeful sign that, when presented with cogent, rational arguments, thoughtful caution can prevail over reckless policy. You have such an opportunity to do so now. As you approach the COP8 meeting, we strongly suggest that you convey to the U.S. delegation the importance of advocating FDA’s new approach to a tobacco risk continuum. The WHO should adopt inclusive policies that promote transparency and collaboration with all parties, and embrace new ways of thinking to address the global health risks associated with cigarette smoking.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

David Williams  
President  
Taxpayers Protection Alliance

Pete Sepp  
President  
National Taxpayers Union

Julie Gunlock  
Director, Center for Progress and Innovation  
Independent Women’s Forum

Michelle Minton  
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Patrick Hedger  
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Saul Anuzis  
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