



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

March 24 1968

Honorable Warren G. Magnuson  
Chairman, Committee on Commerce  
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in reply to your request for a report on S. 559, a bill "To regulate the labeling of cigarettes, and for other purposes."

Under the provisions of this bill, cigarettes may not be manufactured, imported, or packaged for sale or distribution in the United States unless the package (1) is labeled "Warning: Continual Cigarette Smoking May Be Hazardous To Your Health," and (2) states the average tar and nicotine yields per cigarette as determined by the Cambridge Filter Method, or other method approved by the National Bureau of Standards.

If the Congress deems it appropriate to enact legislation requiring that a warning or cautionary statement appear on cigarette packages, the wording should be in keeping with the findings of the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee which reported a general relationship between smoking and health, but not an absolute relationship in every individual case.

The requirement of the proposed bill concerning labeling for tar and nicotine content is both impractical and misleading for a number of reasons. According to the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, the absorption of nicotine from smoking does not constitute a significant health problem. The Committee concluded in its report on Smoking and Health that:

"The chronic toxicity of nicotine in quantities absorbed from smoking and other methods of tobacco use is very low and probably does not represent an important health hazard."  
(Pages 32 and 75)

A statement of tar yield per cigarette also is of doubtful value to consumers. Such a statement assumes a direct relationship between the total quantity of tar and degree of toxicity, whereas the problem is far more complex than this. Of greater significance than the total quantity of tar are the specific substances in tobacco smoke that may be harmful to health. At the present time, there is insufficient



knowledge as to what specific factors create health hazards in cigarettes. The Surgeon General's Advisory Committee concluded that "the amount of known carcinogens in cigarette smoke is too small to account for their carcinogenic activity." (Smoking and Health, page 146) Dr. Luther L. Terry, Surgeon General, Public Health Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in his appearance before the Tobacco Subcommittee, House Committee on Agriculture, on January 29, 1964, stated:

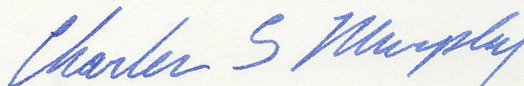
"We need to know much more about the substances in tobacco smoke which produce the health hazards. Until we know more in this area, we will be handicapped in our efforts to remove the hazard. It is difficult to design a method of removing something if you don't know what it is. For example, the known substances in tobacco smoke can account for only a small portion of its cancer producing power. We have no real clues as to what it is in tobacco smoke that influences coronary artery disease--if indeed it does."

In view of the uncertainties in the present state of knowledge, that part of the proposed labeling requirements which relates to tar and nicotine would not safeguard consumers. On the contrary, consumers could be misled.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has stepped up its research to identify any constituents of tobacco smoke responsible for health problems and to find ways of reducing or eliminating them. This work is being coordinated with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Until there is more explicit identification and a more complete understanding of the principal constituents which create health problems, legislation requiring the labeling for such constituents should not be enacted.

The Bureau of the Budget advises that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely yours,



Charles S. Murphy  
Acting Secretary