

#### Weblink 4: Letter to all Senate members

"It's all a charade isn't it? You read the packet, everyone's packet, it tells you that the government's health officers who are not stupid, assert that smoking causes cancer and so on. I am prepared to assume that they haven't made it up. But I am here to do a job. I took the job knowing what I was involving myself in. I am not heavily into hypocrisy. We are all lightly into it."

Nick Greiner quoted in: Simons M. What makes Nick tick? The Australian Magazine 1997; July 12:3.

Dear Fellow of Senate,

I am writing to provide you with background information that I hope will be useful to you in considering a report you will receive at the Senate meeting next week concerning the appointment of the Hon. Nick Greiner AC to the position of chair of the advisory board of the Graduate School of Government.

I have corresponded with the Chancellor on this issue and organized a demonstration of staff and students on the day of the announcement of the School. The Chancellor released his response to my initial letter to the media, as I did my letter to him. Reaction to the appointment has received considerable attention. I, and many of my colleagues, are dismayed by this appointment which I urge you to revoke.

Below I set out the various issues I believe should be considered in debate about this matter.

**"the appointment has no connection whatsoever with any tobacco company"**

The Chancellor has stated: "The appointment has no connection whatsoever with any tobacco company or any role Mr Greiner may have on the Board of such a company. It would be grossly unfair and discriminatory to prevent this form of voluntary contribution being made on such a ground."

In effect, the Chancellor is proposing here that it is appropriate for the University to honour a person for selected aspects of their public record, while effectively pretending that other widely condemned aspects can be ignored. I believe it is wrong to argue that a person's suitability to hold an important office, and indeed, any overall assessment of a person, should ever be based on just part of who they are. Mr Greiner is former politician and premier who I'm told has the respect of many people who share his politics. He is a highly experienced businessman. But he is also a long-standing non-executive director and chairman of a tobacco company, the core issue to which I will return.

I invite you to reflect on the recent resignation of the former Governor General over matters that were by any consideration, only a part of the overall person that Dr Hollingworth is. His defenders argued that his many other qualities were all that were relevant to an assessment of his suitability to retain office. That was not a view shared by the great majority of Australians. I invite you to also consider analogous scenarios whereby a person with aspects to their background that would be likely to bring the university into disrepute was being considered for a senior appointment. I suggest that those counseling that such aspects should be ignored would not be taken seriously.

For Mr Greiner's part he has been quoted in the press as saying "There's not a single, solitary shred of connection between my role [as chairman of a tobacco company] and this appointment".<sup>i</sup> Against this, it needs to be asked whether Mr Greiner would be exercising his proper duty as a tobacco company director if he consciously sought to somehow downplay the importance of that role in any aspect of his wider community life. We should assume that he is proud of and uncompromised by his association and that he would accordingly not hesitate to represent BAT's interests at every appropriate opportunity.

Unsurprisingly, the tobacco industry – just like the University -- encourages its senior representatives to engage with the community to help its business objectives. A recent BAT internal document sets these expectations out plainly:

“Systematic contact should...be maintained with... key audiences whose goodwill and co-operation can help companies achieve their business objectives. These groups can include, for example, employees, suppliers, customers/smokers, the trade, local community leaders, leaders of the financial sector, competition, politicians, the public, tobacco growers, advertising agencies and business leaders... Assistance will not be forthcoming if a company approaches a potential helper only when problems arise... **Steps should be taken to ensure that non-executive directors are given the opportunity to play a full and appropriate role in relationships with government and other appropriate audiences.**

OBJECTIVE

**The objective of external relations activity is to ensure that the full support of key audiences is enlisted.** In this way a company will help itself to sharpen its competitive edge and maintain the freedom to conduct its business in a responsible manner.”<sup>iii</sup> (my emphasis)

“Freedom to conduct its business” and success for a tobacco company means increasing smoking in the community. A corollary of this is that tobacco caused disease like lung cancer and horribly debilitating diseases like emphysema also increase in years to come. The tobacco industry has repeatedly advanced the commercially ludicrous and plainly disingenuous propositions that it does not

wish to increase tobacco use or attract new smokers (principally children). Its website is resplendent with such statements. . For example, I have a large series of Powerpoint presentations provided to me by a former BAT employee detailing explicitly youth oriented promotions in Burmese nightspots and markets in 1998. These activities were occurring in the same period that BAT embarked on a global propaganda campaign emphasising that it strongly opposed youth smoking. As chairman, Mr Greiner presumably endorses these statements being repeatedly made by employees of his company.

My US National Cancer Institute and NHMRC funded research into the tobacco industry's internal documents has located many documents which demonstrate globally coordinated efforts to deny smoking causes disease, that nicotine is addictive and that children are not an industry marketing preoccupation. Senate members can read detailed working papers on these matters on my website<sup>iii</sup>.

This is a hugely disreputable industry, responsible for unparalleled chronic disease throughout the world today.

BAT(Australia) has 43% of the Australian tobacco market, the largest share of any company. The first line of a recent document from the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy states: "Tobacco smoking is the single largest preventable cause of premature death and disease in Australia."<sup>iv</sup> Some 19,000 Australians die each year from tobacco-caused diseases. BAT's "market share" of these deaths is 8,170 deaths, some 24% of which occur in people aged less than 65 years.

### **The existing University policy**

The Senate approved the following policy in September 1982: "The University and its Departments will not accept support from Rothmans or any other tobacco company that involves the nomination of the company as the source of support." It has been put to me by several reporters that university officials have suggested that this policy says nothing that would preclude the appointment of Mr Greiner to a position in the University. I suggest that such a "black letter" view of the meaning of this policy insults the spirit and intent of that original policy.

This intent was to send an important message to the University and to the community that money from the tobacco industry was unacceptable, despite coming from a legal industry. To my knowledge, the University has no other policy about any other industry which might seek to use the University for dubious publicity and public affairs purposes. The University has thus deemed it appropriate for over twenty years to single out the tobacco industry as uniquely worthy of being "shown the door".

This is any ordinary person's understanding of why the University has this policy. 73.6% of the community rate the honesty and ethics of tobacco company executives as being low or very low, compared to only 67% rating car salesmen

that way<sup>v</sup>. What may be less appreciated is why the Senate supported that motion, 21 years ago. It was because Dr Gaston Bauer, who moved the motion, fully understood that the tobacco industry had a track record of corrupting science for its commercial gain and that it cynically sought to engage with independent researchers in order to perpetuate the policy position that controls on tobacco were premature because “more research was needed”.

Since then, other universities have gone on to adopt similar policies. For example, Brigham and Women's and Massachusetts General hospitals in Boston, the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, and the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo all have policies precluding acceptance of research funds from the tobacco industry. The University of Toronto's school of social work, the University of Alberta, and the University of Hong Kong have refused donations from the tobacco industry, and several United States universities, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and the University of California, exclude tobacco stocks from their investment portfolios<sup>vi</sup>. In 1994, 7/10 Australian medical schools refused tobacco money<sup>vii</sup>. Most recently, the editor of the British Medical Journal resigned his chair at the University of Nottingham amid uproar over the University accepting a grant from BAT to fund a Centre for Corporate Responsibility<sup>viii</sup>.

## **Tobacco is a legal product**

I have heard some media comment that “tobacco is a legal product”. The subtext of this remark is that one can avoid engagement with any ethical issues said to be relevant because if something is “legal”, then nothing more needs to be discussed.

I trust that I do not need to remind the Senate that in recent history, many activities which were once entirely legal (slavery, the exploitation of children in mines and factories, exhibiting the deformed for entertainment) are thankfully no longer permitted by civilised societies. In summary, recourse to the “it’s legal” excuse for avoiding debate is an unworthy position for a great University to adopt. We need to engage with the core values that motivated the adoption of the original Senate policy and ask whether the appointment of Mr Greiner ignores those values.

This appointment has potential to be hugely divisive if it is not rescinded. A senior cardiothoracic surgeon at Royal North Shore Hospital told me he was so angered that he was considering withdrawing his teaching services from the University. Dr Garth Alperstein, a pediatrician who has a clinical academic appointment, stated publicly on radio 2BL that he would be urging others to consider doing likewise. The medical students I have spoken with are disillusioned about what has happened and I anticipate they will seek through their student and academic representatives on Senate, to take this matter further. They will have my support and encouragement.

The University of Sydney is attempting to forge important links with the Asian region. BAT is an aggressive tobacco promoter throughout the region. Professor Stephen McMahon, director of the University’s Institute for International Health, is one of many who has written to the Chancellor:

“I have for the past year chaired the Council of a World Bank-World Health Organization initiative on the control of heart disease in developing countries. These countries now face an epidemic of smoking-related diseases that is of unprecedented proportions. The tobacco companies of the developed world, including British American Tobacco, are major contributors to (and beneficiaries of) this carnage. It behoves all of us with a commitment to social justice to ensure we do our utmost to avoid providing support to the tobacco industry and those associated with it.

I hope that you will reconsider this appointment, not only in the interests of the University of Sydney, but also in the interests of the millions alive today who will eventually be killed by the products of British American Tobacco and other tobacco manufacturers.”

Next month, my international peers will honour my work at the 13<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Tobacco and Health with the award of the American Cancer Society's Luther Terry Award for individual leadership in tobacco control<sup>1</sup>. The same award is being given to Mary Assunta, a Malaysian who has led developing nation efforts to support the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, passed unanimously in Geneva in May. Sir Richard Doll, the Oxford epidemiologist who first observed the relationship of smoking and lung cancer in a cohort study of 30,000 British doctors, is also receiving one of these awards. Ms Assunta is enrolled as a PhD candidate in my School. It is my hope that these awards will bring great credit to our University.

Against this background, Mr Greiner chooses to publicly denigrate people such as myself and Ms Assunta as "zealots" who have "wasted 5 minutes of his time". I invite you to reflect on the message that such statements send to all students of medicine, public health and health sciences across the university, and to the community at large.

I fully accept that those responsible for Mr Greiner's appointment may well have not even considered his tobacco industry connections when deciding that he was a suitable appointment. However, I believe this would have been an egregious oversight, and one which in elementary hindsight would need to be considered an error of judgement to be redressed.

The University will suffer some embarrassment if it decides to withdraw Mr Greiner's appointment. However, there is also great potential to turn this regrettable incident into a positive statement about the values the University holds as important. This will send a very memorable message to the entire community.

Thank you for considering my concerns I would be very pleased to address Senate personally should you consider that appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Chapman

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/06/30/1056825336509.html>

<sup>1</sup> [http://tobaccodocuments.org/bc\\_moh/21014.html](http://tobaccodocuments.org/bc_moh/21014.html)

<sup>1</sup> <http://tobacco.health.usyd.edu.au/site/gateway/docs/research.htm#working>

<sup>1</sup> I. Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. Background paper. A companion document to the National Tobacco Strategy 1999 to 2002-03. A framework for action. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999: 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther Terry was a US Surgeon General who published the first Surgeon Generals' report on smoking and disease in 1964.

<sup>1</sup> Wakefield M, Miller C, Woodward S. Community perceptions about the tobacco industry and tobacco control funding. Aust NZ J Public Health 1999;23:240-4.

<sup>1</sup> <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/323/7303/1>

<sup>1</sup> <http://tc.bmjournals.com/cgi/reprint/3/4/308.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/322/7294/1118.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/06/30/1056825336509.html>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://tobaccodocuments.org/bc\\_moh/21014.html](http://tobaccodocuments.org/bc_moh/21014.html)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://tobacco.health.usyd.edu.au/site/gateway/docs/research.htm#working>

<sup>iv</sup> 1. Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. Background paper. A companion document to the National Tobacco Strategy 1999 to 2002-03. A framework for action. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999: 1.

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<sup>vi</sup> <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/323/7303/1>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://tc.bmjournals.com/cgi/reprint/3/4/308.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/322/7294/1118.pdf>