



AMERICANS for
NONSMOKERS'
RIGHTS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 15, 2006

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ANOTHER FACE OF PAGEANTRY

R.J. Reynolds manipulates the National Association of Miss America State Pageants

(Berkeley, CA) – Major public health organizations called on the National Association of Miss America State Pageants (NAMASP) and its state affiliates to end their partnerships with R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, in which state titleholders visit schools to promote R.J. Reynolds' so-called "youth smoking prevention program," *Right Decisions Right Now*. Through this program, the tobacco company has succeeded at roping in Miss "States" winners into acting as spokespeople for its project.

"We have been tracking and exposing tobacco industry tactics for more than 30 years," said Cynthia Hallett, Executive Director of Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, "and none of the 'tobacco prevention programs' designed by tobacco companies have been effective at preventing youth smoking. R.J. Reynolds is using the reputation of NAMASP and its titleholders to make the company appear as a good corporate citizen and continue to sell their deadly product. The facts are, tobacco companies target youth and women with seductive advertising and promotions enslaving them to a lifetime of addiction and disease."

Once secret tobacco industry documents illustrate that the tobacco companies' "anti-smoking" programs, including R.J. Reynold's *Right Decisions, Right Now*, were developed as a marketing tactic to divert attention away from smokefree air campaigns, to increase youth smoking rates by presenting smoking as being an "adult act" and to collect marketing data on youth (<http://www.ucsf.edu/senate/townhallmeeting/YouthSmokingPrograms.pdf>). *Right Decisions, Right Now* allows R.J. Reynolds to work through third parties like NAMASP and allows the industry to build alliances and relationships with educators and other legitimate allies.

The tobacco company's NAMASP sponsorship program was originally piloted in eight states, with an additional 15 states added the second year of the partnership. The program makes it possible for each state and its titleholder to establish or enhance an annual speaking tour that can be incorporated within a titleholder's existing platform.

More than 3 million youth are current smokers in the United States, and it is estimated that twice that number (6.4 million) will eventually die from smoking-related diseases. According to a report published in *The Lancet*, deaths from lung cancer and other health problems tied to

tobacco use are expected to double to 10 million per year by 2020, but the real figure likely will be much higher. Researchers attribute increased smoking rates among young girls as being one attributable factor.

“Nearly one in five women are smokers, and the vast majority started smoking at a young age,” said Cheryl Heaton, Dr. P.H., President and CEO of the American Legacy Foundation, a national public health organization dedicated to building a world where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit. “Active smoking or secondhand smoking is linked to lung, breast, and cervical cancers, heart disease, and infertility in women, and low birth weight, SIDS (Sudden Infant Death), and respiratory and cognitive impairments in babies. As the gatekeepers to and guardians of our communities, one of the greatest acts we, as women, can do to protect our health and the health of our families is to reject the presence of tobacco and what it represents, in all shapes and forms.”

Former Miss Indiana local contestant, Tristan Emery encourages NAMASP’s state titleholders to educate themselves about their sponsors: “NAMASP is a wonderful organization that provides a great and unique opportunity for young women to take on leadership roles in their communities,” she said. “It enrages me. These titleholders are good intentioned and do not realize that they are being used by the cigarette companies to hook a new generation of smokers. Pageant titleholders are frequently stereotyped as being an empty shell. Big Tobacco is banking on and enabling this image, and mocking NAMASP, by subverting titleholders to the role of its pawns.”

Each state participating in the expanded program will receive \$5,000 for 20 middle school appearances by their titleholder. Last year, a total of \$115,000 was provided by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to the 23 states that were part of the second phase of the school program. The *Right Decisions, Right Now* program supplies all materials and teaching guides for schools to use with their curriculum at no charge to the schools. Of those NAMASP representatives who are currently or have recently partnered with R.J. Reynolds are Miss New Jersey, Miss Indiana, Miss Massachusetts, Miss Virginia, Miss Missouri, and Miss Maine. Many NAMASP title-holding partners link directly to the R.J. Reynold’s web site.

Tobacco industry targeting of women and teens, particularly in communities of color, is of grave concern. “Tobacco companies continue to pour millions of dollars into recruiting new, younger, female smokers through advertising, sponsorship, and the development of new products such as flavored cigarettes,” said Sherri Watson-Hyde, Executive Director of the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network. “If R.J. Reynolds is serious about reducing youth, young adult, and women smoking rates, it would support evidence-based strategies proven to prevent youth smoking – such as implementing effective media campaigns to denormalize tobacco use, exposing industry dishonesty, and promoting the benefits of smokefree workplace laws.” *Right Decisions, Right Now* does not implement any of these tested strategies.

“R.J. Reynolds is trying to use partnerships with reputable organizations like the Miss America State Pageants to create the illusion that it has changed and is part of the solution to the tobacco problem in order to prevent the adoption of policies and programs that have been shown to reduce tobacco use. The unfortunate reality is that R.J. Reynolds continues to market in ways that make cigarettes appealing to children and continues to oppose the adoption of policies and programs designed to reduce tobacco use,” said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Miss “States” titleholders are role models for today’s youth and women. We strongly encourage all Miss “States” who are current partners with RJ Reynolds’ *Right Decision, Right Now* to end their partnership with the tobacco giant and work with legitimate, public health youth prevention programs.

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