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July 2, 2015

Dear Mr. Peterson,

While I understand and respect that we may have different approaches to looking at health issues, and thus, tobacco prevention, it's important we are communicating using the same facts. You may have us confused with the ND Center for Tobacco Prevention and Control, which does have a large operating budget from the Master Settlement Agreement as per a vote of the people. Tobacco Free North Dakota is a small non-profit with volunteer board members and one contract consultant to help carry out our mission.

Yes, tobacco is a legal product, a consumer product that kills 480,000 Americans annually. Tobacco companies, unlike the vast majority of the North Dakota businesses you work to represent, are not responsible corporations, a fact that has been proven in court. The burden of tobacco, however, is a prime contributor to the health insurance premiums many of your member businesses are left paying each and every year.

Where we surely can agree is how price affects purchasing power. Tobacco taxes are the most effective way to prevent youth from ever smoking, another point on which I'm certain we both agree is important. The State of North Dakota has plateaued with high quality education programs. But as 4 out of 5 adult smokers are addicted by age 18, when all tobacco products are *illegal*, a fact that clearly dismisses the notion that tobacco is nothing more than adult choice, we have a responsibility to address it.

Policies that address very low price and/or that create protections that limit access to tobacco products (like electronic cigarettes) are important tools that prevent a lifetime of tobacco-related diseases and produce a healthier workforce.

We believe in reducing tobacco use to save lives, but it also promotes fiscal conservatism with reduced health care spending. Any insurance company, including those you represent at the GNDC, would confirm this. These are not our facts alone, and they are the facts on which we base our efforts.

We do not intend to engage in unnecessary or unproductive argument but rather to use this opportunity to recognize and highlight our shared goals of a healthier state and to work toward accomplishing that goal together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric L. Johnson", written over a white rectangular area.

Eric L. Johnson, M.D.
President

cc: Jack Dalrymple, Governor; Dr. Terry Dwelle, State Health Officer; Karen Ehrens, Healthy North Dakota Coordinator