

# Congress, tobacco: A powerful pro teen-smoking team

By Marian Wright Edelman  
 Special to Sentinel-Voice

Just as schools were letting out, with long, idle summer days stretching ahead for students, the United States Senate decided to follow Senator Phil Gramm's lead and blow smoke at our children.

Our lawmakers chose to vote to defeat legislation that was a landmark opportunity for this country to reduce teen smoking and promote children's healthy development by investing in child care and after-school programs.

Big tobacco interests put \$40 million into an advertising campaign to defeat the legislation, proving once again where they stand: for profits and against children. But that's not news, is it? The tobacco industry has long targeted children as future customers.

One company even paid to insert smoking scenes into popular movies, such as the Muppets, to observe the attitudes towards smoking of children as young as five.

As a result of these calculated efforts, more

than three million American teenagers smoke and 3,000 children start smoking each day — one every 30 seconds. Over 16 million American children were projected to start smoking last year.

One out of three teen smokers will eventually die from tobacco — imposing \$200 billion in future health costs. The legislation the Senate sent up in smoke could have made a difference in those statistics, as well as set aside a portion of the more than \$500 billion generated in tobacco revenues as a down payment for child care and after-school activities, making an enormous difference for millions of children.

Studies have shown that the nearly five million children who are left home alone after school are much more likely to give in to negative peer pressure or pressure from industry, and to engage in risky behaviors that jeopardize their futures. These are precisely the teens targeted by the tobacco industry. Studies also show that children engaged in constructive after-school activities are less likely to smoke and get into

trouble with the law. After-school programs also provide an important opportunity to present anti-smoking strategies. In addition to providing the adult supervision that is so important, effective anti-smoking curricula have been incorporated into many community after-school programs to further enhance smoking prevention efforts.

Quality child care for our young children is also very important in the fight against teen smoking. It is clear that by promoting children's healthy development and helping children to make good choices, quality child care programs are effective tools to reduce teen smoking. Recent research shows that the first three years of life are critical to brain development and to laying the foundation for positive self-esteem. Quality early childhood and after-school programs have been shown to reduce criminal behavior which is correlated with risky behaviors, such as smoking and drug use.

Parents are working harder than ever to support their families and provide bright futures

for their children. Yet they face great difficulty finding safe, reliable care for their children while they are at work. Ask America's parents and they'll tell you they wish they could do better for their children, but cannot because costs are too high, they can't find the quality they're looking for, or the demands of their work schedules limit their choices.

It made sense to invest tobacco funds in the child care programs that work for America's children and families. Rarely have so many important goals been addressed in a single piece of legislation before Congress. But Congress said no. In effect, they told our children to "light up." Let's remember that in November when they're asking for our votes.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund and a working committee member of the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC). In 1998 CDF celebrates 25 years of advocacy service and leadership to build a movement to Leave No Child Behind.

## Nicotine

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 because they inhale more deeply or smoke stronger cigarettes, they also would take in more cancer-causing substances such as tar. That, in turn, may explain why black smokers get lung cancer at higher rates than white smokers, the researchers said.

In a related study, a separate team of researchers compared rates of metabolism — the body's process of breaking down food to make energy — and nicotine intake among 40 black and 39 white smokers.

Cotinine blood levels per cigarette smoked were significantly higher in black smokers than in white smokers,

said the researchers, led by Dr. Eliseo J. Perez-Stable of the University of California at San Francisco.

Although no significant difference was found in rates of nicotine metabolism, blacks cleared cotinine from their bodies at slower rates and took in more nicotine per cigarette.

Dr. Edward M. Sellers, a professor of pharmacology and medicine at the University of Toronto and Women's College Hospital, said that doesn't mean differences in nicotine metabolism between races don't exist.

Instead, the study may have been too small to show such differences, said Sellers, who

was not involved in either study.

Differences in nicotine metabolism could be important: A person whose body uses up nicotine relatively fast might, as a result, crave more cigarettes, inhale more deeply or choose a stronger brand.

Sellers praised both studies as careful and important but agreed with their authors that more research is needed.

He said it is well-established that blacks metabolize some drugs differently because of genetic differences.

And recent studies suggest a genetic trait linked to protection from nicotine

addiction may be missing in Africans, he said.

He said he believes genetic differences will probably account for differing smoking patterns among the races.

"If you can understand the genetic basis for the addictive disorder," he said, "then you might be able to actually individualize treatment, not only by group, but by an individual's genetic characteristics."

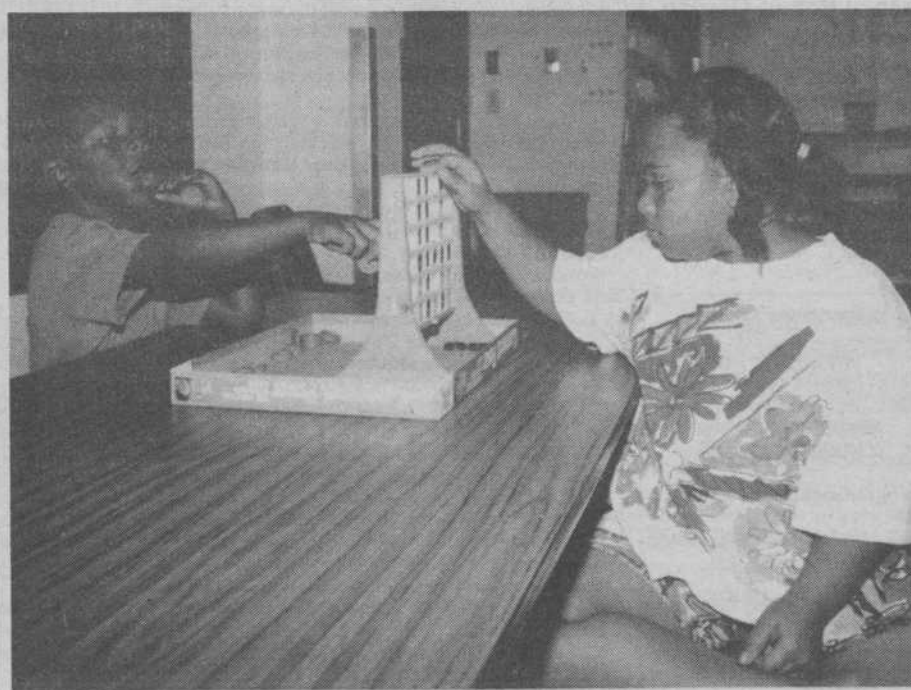
## Prostate

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 sized sex gland in men that make the fluid that carries sperm. Surgery is the standard treatment for prostate cancer, the second leading cause of deaths in men.

Clinical trials of the Free PSA test involved 773 men between the ages of 50 and 75 who had total PSA levels between four and 10 and non-suspicious digital rectal exams.

The test was developed by Hybritech Incorporated, a subsidiary of Beckman Coulter in Fullerton, Calif.

For more information about the test, patients can call the center at (713) 798-5050.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Mario Wilbert and Christina Smith enjoy a friendly game inside the multi-purpose room at the Dog Catchers Foundation summer youth camp.

## Dog Catchers

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 first day here," 8-year old Christina Smith said. Her brother, Darnell, 14, said, "So far it has been fun."

The foundation counts more than 3,000, including adults. Membership is free.

Being a nonprofit can be difficult, Thorne

said, especially without a tax identification number for tax deductions on donations. He asks for more public support.

Those interested in more information on Dog Catchers Youth Foundation can write Thorne at 1100 Bullrun, North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030 or call him at 399-5809.

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