

March 10, 2004

<Member>

<Office>

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

We are writing today as groups in One Voice Against Cancer (OVAC), a collaboration of public interest groups representing more than 20 million Americans impacted by cancer, to ask you to vote for the Harkin-Feinstein amendment to the Budget Resolution that would increase public health funding and dedicate funds to deficit reduction. The amendment calls for an increase of \$1 in the federal tobacco tax, which is currently only \$.39 per pack. It is estimated that this would produce a total of \$16 billion (score pending) annually, of which approximately \$6 billion would be directed to Function 550 programs. The rest would be set aside for deficit reduction.

One Voice Against Cancer has joined with nearly 400 health organizations in recommending that funding for health programs in Fiscal Year 2005 be increased by 12%. Unfortunately, neither the President's budget request nor the budget resolution marked up by the Senate Budget Committee commits adequate resources to address the wide range of responsibilities of the public health system. The Harkin-Feinstein amendment seeks to solve this problem – while also demonstrating fiscal discipline with respect to the federal deficit.

The amendment makes sense from both a public health and a fiscal perspective. The nation's public health infrastructure will be strengthened through the infusion of new funds and a substantial amount will be set aside for deficit reduction. In addition, smoking costs the nation more than \$155 billion annually in medical care and lost productivity. Increasing the tobacco tax is a proven way to reduce smoking rates: for every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes, overall consumption declines by three to five percent and youth smoking by seven percent.

Cancer remains one of the nation's most pressing health concerns. This year alone, more than 1.3 million people will be newly diagnosed with cancer while more than 556,000 will die. The Harkin-Feinstein amendment will enable the nation to make progress in the fight against cancer by committing substantial resources to public health.

One Voice Against Cancer strongly urges you to vote for the Harkin-Feinstein amendment. The nation's health is at stake.

Sincerely,