supposed to be a non-travelling sabbatical period, he agreed in view of the extremely serious tobacco situation. By good fortune, when the bill made its way to the president, Peto's senior collaborator, Sir Richard Doll, whose pioneering epidemiological work was the cornerstone of the world's first major scientific report on the dangers of smoking, happened to be in Turkey, an opportunity not lost on Professor Dagli. Health advocates also asked colleagues around the world to send faxes to the president, whose staff told Mr Arkacali that they were amazed to be receiving faxes "from countries we have not heard of".

Nevertheless, the prospects still did not look good. Days before the deadline, the president's assistant, the Turkish news media gave massive press coverage to two studies in the USA, apparently indicating positive aspects of smoking; the coverage on just one day reportedly exceeded the total anti-tobacco coverage of the previous several years. In addition, other, dirtier tricks seem to have been played: for example, a pro-health television programme about tobacco, which was a key card in the hand played by the health lobby, failed to reach viewers when cables from the television station were apparently disconnected. A nervous medical delegation, summoned to Ankara to see the president at the last moment, was reassured by the reputedly wily politician, who until then had kept his position obscure. In an emotional climax to the campaign, bringing tears to the eyes of many of his audience, he reassured them that he knew all about the problems of tobacco and would be signing the bill within the next day or two. As no word as his word, he did so two days later.

What is so remarkable about the bill is its boldness, especially after so many years of virtually no tobacco control, and where the industry is known to have threatened not only members of parliament, but also journalists who focused in any detail on tobacco. The bill provides for a complete ban of all tobacco promotion (including sponsorship); for non-smoking to be the norm in many public places (including health and education premises); and—most radical and far-sighted of all—it states that the state radio and television company and all private television channels have to broadcast programmes to educate people about the health hazards of tobacco for at least 90 minutes each month. (For more information on the law, see the letter to the editor on page 61 of this issue.)

Further details, such as the way health warnings are designed, remain to be worked out back in parliament; and no doubt the industry will be hard at work to think of ways to wreck, subvert, or legally challenge the bill. The health lobby will want to ensure that the new law, once it takes effect, is properly monitored and enforced; and the government will have to get into the routine of regular tax rises, the absence of which, as has been seen in Scandinavia, can counteract the benefits of even the best legislation. Most important of all, Turkey will have to work hard to learn from the often bitter experience of countries that began their tobacco control efforts two or three decades ago, to try to minimise the needless waste of human life that lies ahead. But in a year when US President Bill Clinton made tobacco control an election issue, President Demirel gave Turkey its first real chance of success.

South Africa: editors have feelings, too

Being nice, caring corporate citizens is clearly catching on among the big tobacco companies. In Romania, we had RJ Reynolds placing a small but voluntary health warning on its cigarette packs "as a token of respect for Romanian consumers" (Tobacco Control 1996;5:189). Now we learn that R & R Tobacco, the South African arm of the Rembrandt/Rothmans empire, has gone one better, by selflessly putting its commercial interests aside in favour of respect for the feelings of those most sensitive and delicate beings, newspaper editors. The tobacco giant decided to pull its advertising from The Star, one of the country's most influential newspapers, as, among other reasons offered, it said it "did not want to embarrass the editor", who had run a strong anti-tobacco editorial in support of the health minister's declared intention of outlawing tobacco advertising. Painless in his observance of the company's new compassionate stance, R & R Tobacco's press officer would not respond to any of the queries put to him by another South African newspaper, "because of the sensitivities regarding this issue". Most interesting among the more realistic exchange of words which followed was The Star's announcement that the advertising slots vacated by the tobacco group had been picked up immediately by other clients who, it said, were "extremely happy to have the prime positions on the front page".

1996: the year voters rejected the Marlboro Man

The American elections of 1996 will be remembered by tobacco control advocates as the year their issue took centre stage in political campaigns from the national level to the local level, a year in which candidates from both parties scrambled to position themselves as anti-tobacco, and a year in which voters made it clear once and for all that candidates who support tobacco companies do so at the risk of losing office.

Although tobacco issues have been raised in numerous election campaigns before, the issue never received the prominence it got in 1996. According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, of the top network news stories about the campaign from 15 May until 1 October, tobacco stories ranked seventh, just behind crime.

If this politisation of tobacco continues, the tobacco industry could see its influence over both parties diminish. Republicans may look at the losses they suffered and decide that the financial support they receive from the tobacco industry is not worth the loss of support it costs them with voters. Tobacco-state Democrats may begin to realise that the benefits of their long-time mutually supportive relationship with the tobacco industry may no longer outweigh the political costs. This shift could reduce the tobacco industry's influence over the Democratic party as a whole.

SMOKERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY PRO-TOBACCO

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the 1996 election was confirmation that smokers do not vote in line with the tobacco industry. One of the biggest obstacles preventing political office holders from supporting tobacco control measures has been the fear that doing so would cause a backlash among the smokers in their district (typically about 25% of the voters). The 1996 presidential campaign provided a perfect opportunity to test this hypothesis. If smokers are likely to vote against a pro-tobacco-control candidate, then Bill Clinton would surely have been hurt at the polls. Clinton was the most pro-tobacco-control president in history
and chose to make tobacco issues one of the highlights of his campaign.

In contrast, his opponent, Senator Bob Dole, had for a long time been one of the biggest, most unabashed supporters of the tobacco industry in Congress. If ever there was an opportunity for smokers to show their dissatisfaction for a pro-tobacco-control candidate, this was it.

Smokers, however, did not withdraw their support for Clinton. In fact, smoking voters actually voted for Clinton at a higher rate than did non-smoking voters. A national telephone survey, conducted the day after the election by EDK Associates, found that, nationally, President Clinton carried 54% of voters who smoke, compared with Bob Dole’s 37%.

Another national survey conducted by the Voter News Service came up with similar numbers: 53% of smokers voted for Clinton, whereas 36% voted for Dole. These figures show significantly higher support for Clinton among smokers than among the national popular vote (49%) and lower support for Dole among smokers than among the national popular vote (41%).

These results show that smokers do not vote as a block and give lie to the notion that a candidate with a strong tobacco control stance will automatically lose the votes of smokers. This election demonstrated that tobacco is a different issue than, say, gun control or abortion. Criticising tobacco companies doesn’t lose votes because the tobacco industry has no constituency beyond their stockholders. In fact, voters who smoke are concerned about the same things as those who don’t, including a healthy, safe future for their children.

THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE: A CLEAR CONTRAST

Tobacco issues provided one of the clearest contrasts between the two major presidential candidates in 1996. The Clinton campaign highlighted the president’s support of the Food and Drug Administration’s initiative to curb the tobacco industry’s target marketing to kids as a symbol of his character in standing up against special interests and of his support of families.

Clinton’s and the Democrats’ embrace of regulation restraining tobacco marketing to kids proved popular, or at least no problem, even in tobacco states. Clinton’s percentage of the popular vote in tobacco-growing states actually improved over 1992 and he carried two of the largest tobacco-growing states, Kentucky and Tennessee, just as he did in 1992.

In contrast, Bob Dole stumbled over the tobacco issue—and the mountain of tobacco campaigns dollars he and his party took—right out of the starting gate and he never regained his footing. Shortly after his retirement from the US Senate, and just as his campaign should have been developing momentum, Dole lost his temper in an interview with NBC’s Katie Couric, who simply asked him about his stand on tobacco. The story dominated Dole’s campaign coverage for days* and his denial of the addictiveness of tobacco and echo of the tobacco industry’s line that milk could be as deadly as cigarette smoke came to symbolise the belief that Dole was out of touch with most Americans. This was an image that Dole was never able to successfully overcome and, in the final weeks of the campaign, Dole’s association with tobacco money and the tobacco lobby undermined his credibility in attacking Clinton’s questionable campaign contributions.

SENATE AND HOUSE CAMPAIGNS: THE COST OF TOBACCO MONEY

Largely because of President Clinton’s strong support of tobacco control measures, tobacco issues had become increasingly partisan by 1996. Many expected that Democratic congressional candidates in tobacco states would pay the price for the party’s anti-tobacco stands, but that was not the case. No congressional seats changed party hands in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, or Tennessee. In North Carolina, two Republican seats actually switched back to the Democrats, and the seat of long-time industry supporter Charlie Rose remained Democratic. One of the few Democratic incumbents to lose this year was in Kentucky, where incumbent Mike Ward lost to Republican Ann Northup, who has been a strong advocate defeated her opponent.

Paul Wellstone (Democrat (D)) scoured Rudy Boschitz (Republican (R)) as ‘the senator for Marlboro Country’, challenging him to return his tobacco donations. Illinois Democrat Dick Durbin pronounced tobacco industry “the official sponsor of the Republican Party and their newest product is Al Salvi”.

The issue worked for anti-tobacco candidates for the US House of Representatives, as well. For example, Democratic challenger Rod Blagojevich (Illinois), in ousting freshman Republican Mike Flanagan (R), made Flanagan’s acceptance of more than $18,000 from tobacco companies in the past two years a pillar of his campaign.

The public’s distaste for politicians who accept tobacco money shouldn’t have come as a surprise, as many public opinion polls in the past have found that voters are less likely to vote for candidates who accept campaign contributions from tobacco interests. The national poll by EDK Associates (mentioned above), taken immediately after the election, found that 39% of voters were either less likely (29%) or much less likely (10%) to vote for a candidate they know accepts tobacco money. The poll found that even 35% of smokers are less likely to support a candidate who accepts tobacco money.

ANN NORTHUP: ANTI-TOBACCO ON TOBACCO ROAD

Perhaps the most startling outcome of the 1996 elections was a Congressional race in the heart of tobacco country where an anti-tobacco advocate defeated her opponent, a pro-tobacco incumbent. Ann Northup, a Republican from Louis...
ville, Kentucky and a long-time critic of the tobacco industry, made her opponent Mike Ward’s (D) acceptance of tobacco money an issue in her successful campaign. Ward, in fact, was the only incumbent Democratic House member to be defeated this year. As a state legislator, Northup had pushed for strong measures against teenage smoking and had proposed a higher state excise tax on cigarettes as a way to help Kentucky’s farmers diversify.

STATE REFERENDA: VOTERS REJECT TOBACCO INDUSTRY DECEPTION

Voters in many states are given the chance to vote directly on some issues in addition to voting for candidates for office (referred to as ballot initiatives, or referenda). In these races, too, 1996 proved to be a bad year for the tobacco industry. Most prominently, voters in Oregon approved a 30-cents-per-pack increase in the state cigarette tax despite an intense media campaign aimed at defeating the measure.

Opponents of the Oregon tax proposal were heavily funded and sponsored a series of television commercials that were ostensibly presented by an advocacy group called “Fairness Matters to Oregonians Committee” (FMOC). Supporters of the tax, however, provided evidence to the media that all but $20 of the $2.664.600 spent by FMOC came from one source—the Tobacco Institute. Tax supporters challenged the FMOC commercials before the Federal Communications Commission, which decided, one week before the election, that the FMOC’s commercials had to disclose that they were, in fact, funded by the Tobacco Institute.

In the weeks leading up to the election, polls considered the Oregon initiative too close to call, but on election day, after a week of high-profile controversy surrounding the Tobacco Institute’s surreptitious campaign, voters approved the tax increase 56% to 44%. The Oregon referendum recalled a similar campaign in California in 1994, where support for a weak, statewide, anti-smoking law dropped dramatically when it was revealed that the sponsor of the proposed law was tobacco giant Philip Morris.

In other states, referenda on non-tobacco issues were also affected by the anti-tobacco trend of 1996. Tobacco was used as a campaign issue in the fight for campaign finance reform in referenda in Maine and Montana. In each state, tobacco was cited as an example of why curbs on corporate influence of elections are necessary. Similar arguments were made with campaign finance reform efforts in California.

TOBACCO MONEY AT THE STATE LEVEL

The tobacco money issue proved powerful in state races as well. In Nebraska, State Senator Dan Fisher, the main sponsor of a tobacco-industry “super pre-emption” bill in the last session, was defeated after concerned citizens and grassroots groups raised the question of Fisher’s association with the tobacco industry throughout the campaign.

In California, at least three candidates for the state legislature who criticised their opponents for accepting tobacco money, won. One besieged California Assemblyman, Steve Kuykendall, who was criticised in his 1996 election for taking $125 000 from Philip Morris during the final days of his 1994 campaign, moaned, "It has caused a lot of heartburn. I must say that. There is no need to go back. Just the aggravation it causes, why put up with it?" Kuykendall squeaked by, winning re-election by as few as 900 votes.

Another California state Assembly candidate, attacked by her opponent for taking money from tobacco companies in her past election campaigns, swore off tobacco money in the future. It is “absolutely not worth the hit,“ Tricia Hunter complained. Hunter lost her election bid for an open seat, despite the fact that she had previously served in the Assembly.

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In reference to Vice President Gore’s emotional tribute to his sister at the Democratic National Convention in August 1996.

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