

Speech given by Dr Prudence Stone at the Gisborne Cancer Society youth debate, May 31 World Smokefree Day

That tobacco products should be removed from retail display.

Affirmative team; won

Rory McCourt, Lytton High

Sam Whittle, Girls High

Moana Mackey, MP

Negative team; lost

Storme Hitaua, Boys High

Jack Watling, Champion College

Craig Bauld, Councillor

Congratulations to both teams for representing what is currently a national debate: whether government should remove tobacco from display at retail outlets. The Smokefree Coalition supports government to introduce this measure; it is one of our nation's treaty obligations, as a signatory to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

I'm not going to repeat all the arguments already convincingly made by the affirmative team. I think it goes without saying which side I'm on... What I'd like to spend a few minutes on is the importance of debate, and the key role our voices play in advocacy on this issue. I'm going to focus on this because it's clear to me that one or two of the debaters tonight have a vocation in public address – and I don't mean the councillor or the MP! – and I for one would like to steer them toward tobacco control.

Let me introduce who I work for: the Smokefree Coalition is a growing membership of non-government organisations with a vested interest in New Zealand becoming tobacco free. Organisations such as the Cancer Society, ASH, the Asthma Foundation, the Heart Foundation, the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society...o rganisations who realise that the pressures they are under to improve conditions for New Zealand in their respective fields would be considerably relieved by one shared goal, our country becoming Smokefree.

So we partner together as a network, to collectivise our voice.

We have different work to do, differing methods, smaller or greater resources, different priorities, and there is no time to reach a consensus: every year 5000 more smokers go to their death, and countless more to sickbeds. The Smokefree Coalition's members collectivise, but we do not become singular: rather, we become discursive.

Now discourse is what is at the heart of debate. What does it mean? It's when we share the one same interest, but we represent it differently... just as the teams tonight very skilfully showed.

As director my role is to coordinate the membership, make advantageous connections amongst members, get them to cooperate or pool their resources, assure the most effective, cohesive advocacy.

Advocacy is another word that is at the very heart of debate, but is often misunderstood. It means to support and inform key decision makers and stakeholders, who might serve our interests.

As advocates we take the discourse of the Coalition straight to the Beehive, and I also make sure the discourse is delivered evenly throughout the Coalition itself.

Without this advocacy's central role, our tobacco control network cannot function as a team, and without a sense of teamwork, we are lost against our enemies; the tobacco industries. I will talk about them soon...

But first a little more about the team in tobacco control. Beyond the central role played by advocates, there are others. Our goal of course is cessation, for New Zealand to become Smokefree; so on Goal Shoot, if you like, there are our fleet of cessation service providers. On Goal Attack, health promotion and all the social marketing that enables us to target the groups in our society most at risk. On Wing Attack we have good research and development, backed up closely on Wing Defense by all the training and evaluation we need to ensure our services and policies are best practise - and they are; we're watched closely around the world for our delivery of cutting edge cessation services and policies.

On Goal Defense, there must be enforcement of our Smoke-free Environments Act. And our Goal Keep, the entire health workforce, under pressure to keep 5000 premature deaths from happening. Under pressure because smoking related diseases are some of the most expensive to try and treat. We are fighting the deadly diseases.

We keep score counting down, from those deaths. From how many smokers there are in New Zealand, from how many kids are taking it up... and from how many quit attempts it takes – the average, some experts say, is 14 quit attempts before a smoker is successfully smokefree for life.

Our opponents, on the other hand, keep a different score; they are counting up. How many cigarettes on lips? How much netted profit? Both counts are in billions.

The goal for the tobacco industry is sales and profits, so their Goal Shoot is the multinational corporate manufacturing of tobacco into branded products that dominate the marketplaces of the world. Goal Attack is a comprehensive distribution channel spidering into every nook and cranny of the world's terrain, including most boats, oil rinks and other seabound populations. In Central position, against us advocates of the Coalition, they place their marketing and promotional vehicles. While we support and inform government, the tobacco companies market and promote their products directly to youth. It has lobbyists in Wing Attack, relentlessly undermining our advocacy by using its influence and economic powers to sway government from making the right choices for its public.

I want to point out here the very subtle difference between advocacy and lobbying, because on the surface the two activities are hard to tell apart, but when you look at the resources used to perform either, the difference becomes starkly obvious: advocacy you remember means to support and inform our decision makers, while lobbying means to put pressure on them, to persuade them. We advocates use our information in debate, we use our voices, and we represent the interests of our community.

Lobbyists don't need all that, because what they have is their economic power, their trade relations, which gives them all sorts of influence and power to direct the decision making.

On tobacco's Goal Defence it has all the myths us humans only too easily keep alive amongst ourselves, like "smoking is cool" for instance. Like "it's the individual's right to choose", and when need be, tobacco brings out a fleet of litigation experts to defend this, despite the fact that tobacco compromises this choice with its very own contents that make it addictive.

And that's what's on Goal Keep for tobacco: nicotine addiction. Our Goalies in cessation don't get any smokers through the hoop unless smokers themselves can beat that addiction. And it's powerful. The cravings hurt.

The tobacco industry team is a mighty opponent. It's a big player in the world's scheme of things. When I think about that, it makes me proud to be playing Centre up against.

Now I hope you didn't mind I've used Netball as my analogy for teamwork. It's just that I've played netball and it's a great game with positions we can all understand.

But what we're handling is not a netball, it's a New Zealander. And we're not throwing it around - although we are trying to handle it - we're TALKING to it. All of us are advocates, in this sense, on the tobacco control team; supporting and informing New Zealanders to become Smokefree. And when it's necessary, we DEBATE. Debating is how we shift our game.

So who's reffing? We need someone – a champion – to blow the whistle. Someone like our Associate Minister of Health and now Minister of Whānau Ora, Tariana Turia. When she disrupts the play it's with new rulings; an increase in tobacco's excise tax, for instance, with a schedule of price increases for tobacco products, equalising cigarette and roll your own product prices at the counter. And now currently, a proposal to remove tobacco's retail display, a marketing and promotional vehicle obviously targeted to youth.

We need these better playing conditions. Our ballpark could certainly offer us some advantage if we are to ever beat this terrible and mighty opposition. Without that vehicle of marketing and promotion against us, our advocacy has a fighting chance to reduce youth uptake. A fighting chance for smokers to successfully quit sooner.

Like I said before, I am very proud of my work. It's a long and nasty fight we're in against a serial killer with huge financial backing. Despite the odds, we're making considerable progress, we could even be seeing a real end in sight, by 2020. I encourage all the talented debaters tonight to nourish this important developing skill that they have. It leads to very fulfilling and important work skills in professional life. I hope I'll see you in future working for a Smokefree Coalition member organisation, advocating for New Zealand to become tobacco free by 2020.