



**CITIZENS' COMMISSION
TO PROTECT THE TRUTH**

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**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:
Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:00 A.M. EDT**

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**FORMER U.S. SECRETARIES OF HEALTH, SURGEONS GENERAL,
DIRECTORS OF CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION
URGE LORILLARD, R.J. REYNOLDS AND PHILIP MORRIS TO STOP
MARKETING AND SELLING MENTHOL CIGARETTES**

**COMMISSION CALLS ON THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO LET THE
FDA ACT AND BAN MENTHOL FLAVORING IN CIGARETTES**

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 5, 2014 – The Citizens' Commission to Protect the Truth, a group of all living former U.S. Secretaries of Health, Education, and Welfare; U.S. Secretaries of Health and Human Services; U.S. Surgeons General; and Directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from every administration, Republican and Democrat, since that of President Lyndon B. Johnson, is urging Lorillard (Newport), R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (Kool and Salem) and Philip Morris (Marlboro Menthols) to immediately stop marketing and selling menthol cigarettes.

In letters to these tobacco companies' chief executives, former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr. and former Secretary of a Health and Human Services, Louis W. Sullivan, M.D., Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission, said, "Such action is imperative to avoid encouraging children and teens to start and continue smoking and to avoid the devastating impact of menthol cigarettes on the African-American community."

In a joint statement the former cabinet officers called menthol "the spoonful of sugar that makes the deadly medicine these companies are selling go down." They pointed to overwhelming evidence that menthol disguises the harsh taste of tobacco and makes quitting more difficult, and accused these companies of aggressive marketing to African-Americans which has "savaged" the black community with smoking related deaths and crippling diseases like cancer, heart disease and respiratory ailments like emphysema.

The Commission also called upon the Obama Administration to allow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to act on its Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee's three year old recommendation that the FDA ban menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes based on the distinguished Committee's finding that removal of menthol cigarettes from the market would benefit the public health. In 2009, President Obama signed into law the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which banned all characterizing flavors in cigarettes except menthol, but directed the Scientific Advisory Committee to immediately look into menthol flavoring and gave the FDA authority to ban such flavoring.



In the five years since the Tobacco Control Act was signed, more than two million 12- to 17-year-old children have started smoking and scores of thousands of African-Americans who smoke menthol cigarettes have died or been crippled by cancers and heart and respiratory diseases.

Numerous scientific studies, before and after the Scientific Advisory Committee report, demonstrate that removing menthol from cigarettes is one of the most powerful measures the FDA can take to improve Americans' health. Today the Citizens' Commission released a new report, *Time to Ban Menthol*, written for the Commission by CASAColumbia®, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, and funded with a grant from Legacy®, the nation's premier anti-smoking foundation. This report also confirms these findings.

"President Obama has recently stated that he intended to use his phone and his pen to help the most vulnerable in our society and promote the public interest. He has repeatedly expressed his determination to reduce health care costs," said Califano and Sullivan in a joint statement. "There is no more powerful action the President can take than to use his phone and pen to convince the executives of companies that produce and sell menthol cigarettes to end their promotion and sale of these products and to support the recommendation of the FDA's Scientific Advisory Committee to ban menthol as a characterizing flavor in cigarettes."

At today's press conference former U.S. Health Secretaries Califano and Sullivan will be joined by Dr. Samuel Ball, President and CEO of CASAColumbia and Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine; Robin Koval, President and CEO of Legacy®; Dr. Thelma Daley, past President of Delta Sigma Theta; Carol McGruder, Co-Chair of the African American Tobacco Leadership Council; and Delmonte Jefferson, Executive Director of the National African-American Tobacco Prevention Network.

Menthol and African-Americans

More than 82 percent of African-American smokers (5.4 million) smoke menthol cigarettes and nearly three times as many black smokers smoke menthol cigarettes compared with white smokers. The proportion of African-Americans who smoke menthol cigarettes has jumped from 69 percent in 2002 to more than 82 percent in 2010. Blacks who smoke menthol cigarettes are less likely to quit than those who smoke non menthol cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found as long ago as 2003 that some 50,000 blacks die from smoking related diseases and black men who smoke are more likely than white men who smoke to get lung cancer.

Menthol and Teens

More than 90 percent of adults addicted to cigarettes were hooked before they were 21, most as children and teens. While 37 percent of smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, 50 percent of 12- to 17-year-old smokers smoke menthol cigarettes. While cigarette smoking in general has been declining, the proportion of smokers who smoke menthol cigarettes has increased, particularly among the youngest smokers. Rates of menthol cigarette use have increased most dramatically among 12- to 17-year-old smokers: from 36 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2010. Among young smokers ages 18 to 25, the proportion of smokers who smoke menthol cigarettes has increased from 30 percent in 2002 to 46 percent in 2010.

"How many more children in America will menthol cigarettes hook and how many more African-Americans must die or be crippled by cancers and cardiovascular diseases before the chief executive



officers of Lorillard, Reynolds and Philip Morris remove their menthol cigarettes from the market and before the Obama Administration allows the FDA to use the authority Congress gave it to ban menthol flavoring in cigarettes?" said Califano and Sullivan.

"Once secret tobacco industry documents confirm that the menthol content in cigarettes has long been manipulated to encourage uptake and dependence by youth, especially in communities of color," said Robin Koval, CEO and President of Legacy[®]. "Menthol cigarettes are smoked at dramatically higher rates by newer, younger smokers when compared with older, established smokers. They are also smoked at highly disproportionate rates by African-Americans and other minorities. It's past time that the FDA ban menthol as a characterizing flavor: the research supports it, the public health community urges it and lives literally depend on it," she said.

Dr. Sullivan and Mr. Califano noted that research in the CASAColumbia report indicated that if only 10 percent of menthol smokers quit and only 10 percent of those who would have started smoking menthol cigarettes did not start because of a ban, more than 323,000 smoking-attributable deaths would be avoided by 2050, including 91,744 black smokers. A 20 percent reduction would prevent 478,154 smoking-attributable deaths, including 164,465 blacks, and a 30 percent reduction would prevent 633,252 smoking-attributable deaths, including 237,317 blacks.

Dr. Samuel Ball, CASAColumbia's President and CEO and Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, said, "Too many people die from smoking-related illness; too many are unable to stop; too many teenagers start smoking despite the risks. The decision to ban menthol is long overdue to protect all Americans especially our youth and African-Americans."

The Citizens' Commission to Protect the Truth was formed in 2004. Among its efforts, the Commission shines a spotlight on the continued need to fund truth[®], the independent national youth counter-marketing campaign mounted by Legacy[®], and the only one with demonstrated results in keeping children and teens from smoking. For more information on the Commission, visit its website at www.ProtecttheTruth.org.

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