



January 13, 2006

Letters to the Editor  
North County Times  
(via FAX: 760-745-3769)

Dear Editor:

In his January 7<sup>th</sup> column, John Van Doorn throws out the word “specious” to describe the city of Vista’s logic in charging merchants for a license to sell tobacco. What is truly specious is Mr. Van Doorn’s conclusion that merchants are unfairly paying to have themselves policed. The American Lung Association disagrees with his assertion that “it appears to be” onerous and unreasonable for merchants to pay as much as \$250 per year for a license to sell tobacco, considering that tobacco sales yield in the neighborhood of \$300,000 per year for the average convenience store.

“Let your cops do...the work they signed up for,” he pleads, denigrating Vista’s new “cigarette patrol.” If there are some laws not worth enforcing, would Mr. Van Doorn care to provide a complete list? For the public’s money, enforcement of the laws against selling tobacco to minors is an extraordinary bargain, considering the lifetime of health care expense that can be avoided by preventing kids from becoming addicted to nicotine.

Furthermore, there is a strong business argument based on the benefits of a justly regulated “level playing field.” When the laws are not enforced, it is the unscrupulous merchants who profit from illegal tobacco sales to minors, while honest storekeepers who check for ID become the losers. Tobacco licensure is a small price for merchants to pay for stocking a deadly product; and with adequate policing, the honest merchants are not made into suckers.

Sincerely,

Debra Kelley, Vice President for Government Relations  
American Lung Association  
2750 Fourth Avenue  
San Diego CA 92103  
(619) 683-7519