

STATEMENT OF JOE GARAGIOLA BEFORE THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH, APRIL 14, 2010

Good morning, Chairman Pallone and members of the Committee. Thank you for letting me participate in this important discussion about the dangers of smokeless tobacco products. Smokeless doesn't mean harmless. In my day, we called it chew. Like many generations of Major League baseball players, I started using spit tobacco because I saw other players doing it and I thought it was part of being a Major League player. I chewed during my playing career, and I did not quit until my daughter saw a presentation about the dangers of tobacco in elementary school and begged me to stop. I am so grateful to my daughter for saving me from the pain and suffering that I would have risked if I had continued my habit.

But in my twenty-years-plus working to spread public awareness about the dangers of smokeless tobacco products, many former Major League coaches and players -- like my friends Jack Krol and Bill Tuttle -- died too soon. Their stories and their loved ones "lit the fire" in me to do my part to steer our young people away from this deadly, addictive products.

That is why I agreed, beginning in 1994, to chair the National Spit Tobacco Education Program ("NSTEP"). Through the years, I have worked with NSTEP to raise public awareness and encourage early diagnosis of tobacco-related health problems. I lobbied Major League Baseball to ban the distribution of tobacco products in Major League clubhouses, a rule that is still in effect today. I continue to encourage Major League Clubs to raise public awareness through activities like the "No Chew Crew," a youth club sponsored by the Arizona Diamondbacks that has gotten over twenty thousand

children in the Phoenix area to pledge not to use spit tobacco. And I have spent countless hours urging Major League and minor league players to stay away from smokeless tobacco – or as I call it, spit tobacco. Calling it smokeless tobacco is a subtle commercial: it is spit tobacco.

Of course, I continue to urge Baseball to do more. I would like to see the Major League players agree to the terms of the Minor League Tobacco Policy, which bans Club personnel from using and possessing tobacco products in ballparks and during team travel. I would like the players – who are role models – to quit carrying cans of dip in their uniform pockets, where especially the youngsters can see them. Even more can be done to educate young players about the facts and images of spit tobacco.

But in the bigger picture, this is an uphill battle because smokeless tobacco is not just a baseball problem; it is a problem for all of society. Many ballplayers are addicted to smokeless tobacco, but so are many people from other walks of life – Wall Street executives, firefighters, and police officers. They start early because tobacco companies advertise to them at an early age, and they do not tell the truth. These companies mislead our young people – future ballplayers, but also future lawyers and future bankers – to believe that smokeless tobacco is a safe alternative to cigarettes. It is not. “Fewer people die from it” is the song of the tobacco companies. It’s like saying don’t jump out of the 50<sup>th</sup> floor; jump out of the 30<sup>th</sup> floor. You’ve got twenty floors to your benefit but the answer is the same. This is a dangerous, deadly habit, and Baseball cannot solve the problem by itself. We need make sure the tobacco companies do not target our young people. We need truth in advertising and stronger warnings on packages. They need to realize that smokeless is not harmless.

I thank the Committee for focusing its attention today on this very important issue. We need help.