



aktionszentrum@forum-rauchfrei.de
www.forum-rauchfrei.de

Aktionszentrum Forum Rauchfrei
Mühlenhoffstr.17 · 10967 Berlin
☎ (030)74755922

Sprecher
Johannes Spatz ☎ 017624419964
Dr. Henry Stahl ☎ 017610207105

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Press Release

Chumminess between tobacco industry and the political sector: Bundestag member courts the Association of the Cigarette Industry

When the Association of the Cigarette Industry (VdC) whistles, Norbert Röttgen, comes running. Röttgen is Parliamentary Secretary of the Christian Union parties coalition in the Bundestag. This evening the VdC is once again inviting Bundestag members to a "Parliamentary Evening." Enclosed with the invitation is a position paper in which the key sentence reads:

"A no smoking policy in force in restaurants having an area of at least 75 m2 while allowing the possibility for creation of separate, designated areas for smokers by appropriate means (e.g. through barriers/walls, distance and/or a directed ventilation system."

This is exactly the same position which Röttgen supports in overly hurried obedience in today's edition of the Saarländische Zeitung, and in which he announces that colleagues from the SPD and CSU had agreed to it. Although such agreement was immediately denied by Marion Caspers-Merk and Carola Reimann (both SPD), confusion was created anyway, and that can serve the interests of the VdC. Any means to prevent a smoking ban in restaurants are acceptable to the VdC. Cynically, the position paper of the VdC even suggests a general ban on smoking in schools, which of course had already been enacted in most of the federal lands.

Johannes Spatz, spokesperson for Forum Rauchfrei, sees this push by the VdC, together with some members of the Bundestag, as a cunning, last minute attempt to prevent a general prohibition of smoking in restaurants. "There must be limits set to the power of the VdC, and the chumminess between the political sector and the tobacco industry must come to an end," says Spatz. Forum Rauchfrei calls upon all members of the Bundestag not to attend any spring celebrations, dialogue events or parliamentary evenings of the tobacco industry. On 12 September members of Forum Rauchfrei spotted Klaus Benneter (SPD Bundestag member) attending the so-called "Youth Protection Dialog" of British American Tobacco. (Benneter in spiegel-online on 20 June 2006: Cigarettes, just as beer, are part of "pub culture.") The Spring Celebration of the VdC was attended by (CDU Bundestag member) Laurenz Meyer (spiegel-online of 20 June 2006: Smoking prohibition legislation is not necessary.) Laurenz Meyer Detlef Parr appeared at the 2005 BAT Dialogue Event (mitmischen.de: "The voluntary actions in the gastronomy sector are expressly supported by the FDP and they are succeeding.") These events are just staged by the powerful cigarette industry to pursue its goal of using the political sector for its own purposes. In fact, there is a network of relationships between the tobacco industry and the political sector in Germany,

which is unique in the world. It is this arrangement which has so far succeeded in preventing the passage of effective legislation to protect non-smokers. Spatz asks all members of the Bundestag to distance themselves from the tobacco industry. He appeals in particular to the ethical conscience of the CDU members of the Bundestag. They should support the position that workplaces in restaurants, pubs and bars shall no longer be contaminated by cancer-causing substances. Bundestag members must decide between the healthy well-being of staff and guests of gastronomic establishments on the one hand, and the profit motives of the tobacco industry on the other.