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17 MAY 2012

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letters of 30 April to Vince Cable, Mark Prisk and Chloe Smith about statements attributed to Andrew Lansley in *The Times* on Friday 13 April. As the matter you raise concerns public health, your letter has been passed to the Department of Health and I have been asked to reply.

As the Secretary of State made clear in his interview with Anushka Asthana, *The Times* journalist, his objective as Health Secretary is to deliver better health through a healthier population. It is regrettable that the comments quoted in *The Times* article were made out of the context of his very clear statements about his health objectives. Mr Lansley makes no apology for the fact that cutting smoking prevalence is a key public health priority for this Government, as it has been for its predecessors. As you know, smoking is the primary cause of preventable morbidity and premature death, accounting each year for over 100,000 deaths in the UK. One out of every two long-term smokers will die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.

Ministers believe they must do everything they can to stop future generations from taking up smoking, and suffering the enormous health burden that comes from smoking-related disease. Ministers want to support the majority of smokers who say they want to quit, and help them to do so and to support those who have quit from relapsing back into smoking.

If ministers are successful in their strategy to reduce smoking rates significantly, an inevitable consequence of this will be that over time less and less tobacco would be sold. It is smoking that ministers aim to reduce and consequently the sale of tobacco products. For the good of public health, ministers are trying to arrive at a point where there is no smoking in this country. A smoke-free society has been the objective of this and previous administrations.

As Mr Lansley also discussed with Ms Asthana, and as is set out very clearly in *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England*, the Government takes very seriously its obligations as a party to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which places obligations on parties to protect the development of public health policy from the vested interests of the tobacco industry.

These are the legitimate aims of the Government and this is the context of Mr Lansley's comments that were quoted in *The Times*.

As I am sure you will be aware, the Government has recently launched a consultation on tobacco packaging. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views as to whether standardised, or 'plain', packaging of tobacco products would contribute to the Government's legitimate objective to improve public health.

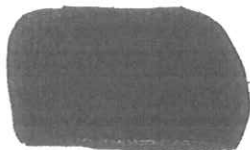
The Secretary of State has an open mind at this stage about introducing standardised packaging, and the consultation sets out a number of options. The Government will duly consider all consultation responses before any decision is made. In considering possible action on tobacco packaging, ministers aim to improve public health, which is a legitimate objective of a responsible Government.

You are right that this Government has made it a priority to promote business, as demonstrated through the Growth Review. Through the consultation, the Government will ensure that everyone with an interest has the opportunity to make their views known, and that ministers better understand the potential impact that standardised packaging of tobacco may have in terms of both public health and business.

The Department would encourage Japan Tobacco International to respond to the consultation in order that the views of all interested parties may be taken into account as part of a transparent and proportionate debate.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A large, solid black rectangular redaction covering the signature of the official.

Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries