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# Government Hooked on Tobacco

**T**HE government has a tobacco habit and there is no more indication that it will "quit cold turkey" than there is that Congress will stop spending more money than it takes in.

Recently, when a memo was sent to President Carter noting that the federal government subsidizes the growing of tobacco and also subsidizes campaigns against using it, because it may be a health hazard, he tossed it aside.

According to reports, Carter wrote on the paper: "I refuse to be drawn into this fruitless issue."

It is an issue, anyway, because government has major interests in tobacco. It is an excellent "political crop."

Politicians can influence votes from growers by working for higher price supports. Then they may attract followers who abhor smoking by supporting a campaign against tobacco as a cause of cancer.

Finally, when tobacco tax reve-

nue rolls in, it can be appropriated for wholesome public needs like schools and roads.

About half of the retail value of tobacco items goes for taxes. Americans smoke about 600 billion cigarettes a year at a cost of \$13 billion. Growers gross around \$2 billion a year for their crops. Obviously, it is more profitable to be a tobacco tax collector than to be a tobacco grower.

Congress has been asked to make transportation of contraband cigarettes across state lines a federal offense. This isn't because smoking is considered to be bad but because states and communities with high cigarette taxes stand to lose as much as \$391 million a year because of "smuggled smokes."

No government is likely to join whole-heartedly in anti-smoking campaigns or to outlaw tobacco with that much cash at stake. Ban something else that causes cancer, not tobacco!

Public demand has brought about segregation of smokers and non-smokers on airplanes, and "No Smoking" signs are appearing in many places. At least 26 states have laws against smoking in theaters, buses, schools and hospitals.

Perhaps the toughest municipal anti-smoking ordinance is one adopted this summer by Berkeley, Calif. It prohibits smoking in privately owned commercial buildings, as well as in public or government buildings and it provides for a \$50 fine for failure to post "No Smoking" signs in them.

Although reports indicate smokers will continue to puff away, tobacco companies have been diversifying. Some have acquired food businesses or manufacturing industries. One is buying an insurance company. Will cancer insurance be offered for sale at tobacco counters, as accident insurance is sold elsewhere?