



Speech by

Michael Choi

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (2.47 p.m.): I rise today in support of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2004. In doing so, can I first of all declare a clear conflict of interest in this subject. No, I do not own any shares in any tobacco industry or company and I will never own any shares in tobacco products or their industries. I do not even smoke. I confess at the outset that I will be unable to conduct myself in my normal, unbiased, level-headed fashion. I will be totally biased. I will be totally unfair to this so-called legal product. I will also be unfair to the manufacturers, promoters and sellers of this product. I do not make any apologies for being so because when lives are at stake commercial fairness pales into insignificance.

For the last few weeks or so tobacco retailers have been lobbying the government hard and used their PR machines via the newspapers to try to force the government to concede the one square metre restriction for their displays. They have been telling everybody that they have been robbed of their rights to have their displays. Cigarettes robbed me of my mother when I was only 13 years of age. More importantly, she was only 43. She was in the prime of her life.

My mother was one of the cleanest and tidiest women I have ever known. She would dust the house on a daily basis and sit in front of the wardrobe to arrange the items in an orderly fashion, only to have it rearranged the next day because it simply did not look right. She would make Mr Monk look unacceptably messy. But the irony of life was that she died of lung cancer, yet she never smoked a single cigarette in her entire life. Unfortunately for her and devastating for me and the family, she worked in an industry in which smoking is accepted and in fact glorified as part of the culture—the entertainment industry, as she was both an actress and an opera singer. In no uncertain terms she was killed by passive smoking. As a young boy I saw her life wither away before my very eyes. I saw her pretty face, which was full of life and body, shrunk into a dry thin layer of wrinkled skin barely clinging to her cheekbones. The best cosmetics money could buy were no match for the corrosive nature of the chemicals doctors injected into her desperately trying to save her. Her hair was her prized possession. In fact, my father once told me that he married her for her hair. Her face and body were just a bonus. Being asked by his wife to keep some of her hair for a keepsake when he helped her in combing what was left of her hair was enough to make any man cry.

So to the tobacco retailers, I say this to you: do not come and tell me that it is a legal product. I know it is. Do not tell me that you have the right to sell them. I know you do. But I will also say this to you: every year there are 20,000 families with similar stories to tell. Also, there are more than 20 young lives being cut short because of the product you sell. You are selling the only products known to man that, when used as intended, will have the outcome of not only killing somebody slowly but also guaranteeing a painful and prolonged death. You are selling a product, as the Premier said yesterday—pretty strong words from the Premier—trading on human misery. Without being unkind to you, you are the agents of death. I would like to think that most of you would not sell rat poison, which also happens to be a legal product, to somebody if you knew that they were intending to consume it and slowly kill themselves. But yet you go to work every day doing that with cigarettes. I ask that you start looking for another business so that you may be able to sleep better at night. Please do not come and ask me for three extra square metres of display for your shop because you have been commercially disadvantaged unless you are able to trade with me one extra

day for every square metre you ask for so that I can spend that with my mother whom I am yet to know well. If you think it is not fair, it is not. Life is not fair, and losing life is definitely not fair. I fully and wholeheartedly commend this bill to the House.