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PROFESSIONAL RODEO COWBOYS ASSOCIATION ENDS TOBACCO SPONSORSHIP
Grassroots activists applaud PRCA, call for a healthy sponsor to replace big tobacco

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Las Vegas, NV-- As thousands gather in Las Vegas this week for the largest U.S. rodeo event of the year, activists are praising the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) for ending its national sponsorship contract with the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (USSTC) after 2009.

"We applaud the PRCA for ending tobacco sponsorship of its rodeos," said Andrea Craig Dodge, director of the Buck Tobacco Sponsorship Project. "Tobacco marketing including sampling booths, scoreboards, banners, and ads gives young rodeo audience members the message that using tobacco is part of being an adult cowboy or rodeo fan."

For several years, a number of tobacco control advocates and community members have called for an end to tobacco sponsorship of rodeos. "Rodeo has been around since the 1800's – long before tobacco sponsorship of rodeos began in 1986," said "Cowboy Ted" Hallisey, a longtime print and broadcast journalist for the sport of rodeo. "Without big tobacco, rodeos will move into mainstream sports because they will be more comfortable for children and families to attend," he said.

"Rodeo has been growing in popularity," said Mark Hicks, project coordinator at Wyoming Through With Chew. "Now that the PRCA is ending its association with USSTC, the sport will thrive even more."

Nationwide, 14% of boys ages 12 to 17 use smokeless tobacco, and the rates are higher in rural states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dodge, Hallisey, and Hicks are collaborating with advocates around the country to circulate an open letter praising the PRCA for allowing its sponsorship agreement with USSTC to expire, and encouraging them to take this opportunity to establish the PRCA as a tobacco-free sport. They are also working with the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to obtain grassroots support for their efforts. "The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids has set up a website at www.GiveTobaccoTheBoot.org that allows grassroots advocates to email the PRCA to encourage them to replace USSTC's sponsorship with a healthy sponsor," said Dodge.

The Buck Tobacco Sponsorship Project, a program of Public Health Law & Policy, Public Health Institute, has worked since 2002 to end tobacco marketing at rodeos and other family-oriented outdoor events. For more information, visit www.bucktobacco.org.

Cowboy Ted's Foundation For Kids is a 501(c)(3) organization that works with youth across the United States to encourage them to make Healthy Choices. Their mission statement is to introduce young people to positive role models who encourage youngsters to choose a healthy lifestyle for themselves, including the choice to refuse to use tobacco products. For more information, visit www.cowboyted.com.

Wyoming Through With Chew began in 2002. Many of their programs are featured on www.ThroughWithChew.com, a resource for tobacco prevention advocates, healthcare providers, and other organizations and individuals who care about tobacco prevention, education, and cessation.

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