

Commercial Alert
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October 5, 1998

Barbara Schaad-Lamphere
President
Board of Directors
Seattle School District No. 1
815 4th Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109-9985
via telecopier: (206) 298-7101

**RE: The Proposed “Cold Beverage Vending Services Agreement”
Between the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Washington and
Seattle School District No. 1.**

Dear President Schaad-Lamphere:

It is not the function of the public schools to deliver a captive audience of innocent and impressionable children to multinational corporations. The public schools are supposed to be a refuge, a sanctuary from commercial hucksters – not yet another place for corporations to peddle their products.

We urge you, and the Board of Directors, not to sell out Seattle’s children to Coca-Cola, and to reject the proposed “Cold Beverage Vending Services Agreement” between Seattle School District No. 1 and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Washington.

The proposed agreement with Coca-Cola contains corrupting incentives that would encourage Seattle’s public schools to push Coca-Cola products on children. Under the agreement, Coca-Cola would “make monthly commission payments to the District based on number of cases [of Coca-Cola products] sold.” In other words, the agreement would make it in the material interest of the public schools to get children to drink more Coca-Cola. Those inducements would compromise the integrity of the public schools. It is inappropriate for public schools to profit from the sales of Coca-Cola.

The proposed agreement would allow Coca-Cola to advertise on vending machines and other product dispensers in the public schools. Advertising does not belong in a public school. Advertising is a form of propaganda. It often uses sophisticated psychological manipulation to subvert reason and promote sales. Advertising is antithetical to reasoning, and to teaching children how to reason. Allowing advertising in schools compromises the civic mission of schools and education.

If the Board allows Coca-Cola to advertise in the public schools, it makes an implicit endorsement of Coca-Cola products. Seattle’s children might understand this implicit endorsement to mean that it is good or healthy to drink Coke. That is the wrong message to send to Seattle’s children. Coca-Cola has no nutritional value. It can lead children into health problems, including obesity and dental caries.

Coca-Cola is not the kind of organization to invite into a school. It is a large multinational corporation. It does not care about children. It does not care about their health, development or well-being. It merely wishes to hook children into a lifetime of soda drinking, and never mind the possible

collateral ills of obesity and dental caries. Multinational corporations like Coca-Cola are interested in one thing and one thing only: profits.

Coca-Cola should have no role in public schools or in raising children. Corporations shouldn't be allowed to decide what's good for children. Parents should decide.

Many parents in Seattle do not wish to have their children drinking Coca-Cola products. Many parents do not think their children's schools should implicitly endorse Coke, push Coca-Cola on their children, or send messages to their children which conflict with their own values. Inevitably, these omnipresent advertisements and implicit endorsement will be the source of conflict between parents and children. In effect, you will pit some of Seattle's children against their own parents. Being a parent is hard enough. Don't make it any harder.

With all the problems you have to deal with and the need to have Seattle's growing property and wealth better support the public schools, why are you provoking this controversy which will surely erupt further should you unwisely seal the Coke deal.

If you approve the agreement, the public schools will receive a modest fee. Most schools, like Seattle's, have tight budgets. More money is almost always needed. But the money from the Coca-Cola agreement comes at a high price -- to the children of Seattle, to their health, and to the status of their schools. The cost is too high.

Children need adults to take care of them, and set a good example for them. Consider the values you transmit to Seattle's children if you approve the proposed agreement with Coca-Cola: that money is worth more than integrity, that selling out brings no shame, that money is more important than health, that monopoly supersedes nutritional choices.

Seattle's children deserve better than this. Set a good example for them. Please reject the proposed agreement with Coca-Cola.

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin
Director

Ralph Nader

cc: Scott Barnhart, Member
Jan Kumasaka, Member
Don Nielsen, Member
Michael Preston, Member
Ellen Roe, Member
Nancy Waldman, Member