



Texans For Public Justice

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Time for Pols to Say ‘No’ To Cash from Big Tobacco

Now that there is zero public tolerance for deadly tobacco marketing campaigns that target women, minorities and even children, it's time to halt tobacco's other dirty campaigns—those that elect public officials.

After decades of deception, the smokescreen surrounding tobacco industry marketing practices is vanishing. Even tobacco executives—who created their own Tobacco Institute to foment lies—now admit that they knowingly marketed deadly carcinogens. If the industry had not invested heavily in politicians and lied outright about what it has done to hook an average of 3,000 young Americans a day, public officials would never have given the tobacco barons such a long leash to peddle cancer. With all that has come to light on this detestable industry, there simply is no longer any excuse for politicians who continue to dip tobacco money.

Even Governor George Bush, who peppers his speeches with messages of personal responsibility, choked in late August when he took more than \$50,000 in contributions from three top tobacco lobbyists, lobbyists who helped organize Bush's recent fund-raiser in Austin. In another troubling link, Bush's top political consultant simultaneously served as a Philip Morris consultant, taking about \$175,000 from the Marlboro Man from 1991 through late last year. The consultant, Karl Rove, recently testified that Bush's policy is not to accept contributions from trial lawyers or gambling interests, but he does not turn away tobacco money.

The tobacco smoke emanating from the Governor's Mansion fails the moral leadership test. It also raises questions about why the Governor has been virtually silent on the state's tobacco lawsuit, which could recover more than \$8 billion dollars for taxpayers. Bush's silence is golden for the tobacco industry.

Governor Bush is not alone. For representatives of a state that doesn't produce much tobacco, Texas politicians harvest plenty of tobacco money. Texas' 1996 congressional delegation took more than \$335,000 from tobacco PACs between 1987 and the 1996 election. Rep. Tom Delay led the way, collecting \$58,950. Next in line behind Delay came Sen. Phil Gramm (\$46,100), Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (\$42,923) and Rep. Richard Arney (\$21,400). In contrast, ten out of the 32 members of Texas' delegation managed to get sent to Washington without accepting a dime of cancer money.

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Back home in Texas, the Texas Democratic Party now forswears tobacco money but the Texas Republican Party took \$96,000 from Philip Morris and the Tobacco Institute under the three-year reign of recently departed chairman Tom Pauken. In addition, Philip Morris has doled out \$160,000 to Texas legislative candidates of both parties since 1991. During the recent legislative session, tobacco companies paid lobbyists almost \$1 million to work over the Lege. These hired guns defeated a proposed cigarette tax hike and worked to gut two health bills. One bill requires cigarette manufacturers to disclose the ingredients in their deadly products while the other protects kids from the industry's most egregious marketing practices.

Taking money from a special interest implies tolerance—if not outright support—for the political agenda that motivated the contribution. With all that has come out about the tobacco industry angling to hook our children and lying to the public and their elected representatives, it is time for Texas politicians to line up behind the people they represent and institute a zero-tolerance policy for tobacco money.

Governor Bush is uniquely positioned to take a leadership role on this issue. The Republican Party of Texas and Governor Bush personally have been too slow to sever their cozy ties to tobacco money and interests. As the chief executive of the next state scheduled to go to trial with the tobacco industry, the Governor wades into a thicket of conflicting interests every time he accepts money from tobacco lobbyists. The Governor needs to tell the public and the tobacco industry that he will no longer traffic in cancer money.

The tobacco industry is responsible for the preventable deaths of 26,427 Texans a year, according to the American Cancer Society. The industry could not have gotten away with killing so many people for so many years if politicians were not on big tobacco's dole. Whether or not Governor Bush exerts badly needed moral leadership on this issue, it's time for Texas politicians of all stripes to refuse to take another dime of cancer money. Enough is enough, already. ●

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