

Texans For Public Justice

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“Governor Bush Should Return Campaign Cash From Tobacco Lobbyists”

And Use His Bully Pulpit to Recover Billions of Dollars From the Industry For Texas

Austin, TX: A watchdog group today called on Texas Governor George Bush to return campaign contributions he has taken from tobacco interests.

“Instead of collecting thousands of dollars for his political campaign, the Governor should be fighting to recover the \$14 billion owed to the state’s taxpayers,” said Craig McDonald, Director of Texans for Public Justice, a non-profit advocacy group which tracks campaign contributions from tobacco interests. “Like Florida Governor Lawton Chiles, Governor Bush should use his office to reclaim the billions that big tobacco owes Texas.”

“The state of Texas is suing tobacco companies to recover \$14 billion in damages, yet the state’s chief executive is pocketing thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from top-gun tobacco industry lobbyists,” said McDonald. “Accepting money from tobacco lobbyists raises thorny ethical questions.”

Governor Bush, who has already amassed a political war chest of approximately \$9 million, is turning to tobacco-industry lobbyists to raise even more money for his campaign. Key sponsors of Governor Bush’s \$800,000 fund-raising gala on August 21 were tobacco lobbyists Mike Toomey, Robert E. Johnson, Jr. and Stan Schlueter.

Toomey, Johnson and Schlueter are Austin-based lobbyists who represent Philip Morris. According to Texas Ethics Commission filings, Philip Morris paid Toomey up to \$100,000 and Schlueter up to \$25,000 to lobby the Legislature this year. Johnson, who also worked the Legislature for R.J. Reynolds, earned up to \$50,000 from tobacco companies. Toomey and Schlueter contributed \$25,000 each to sponsor the August 21 Bush event. Johnson sat on the fund-raiser’s steering committee.

Ralph Wayne, the Texas Civil Justice League’s top lobbyist, was a \$5,000 sponsor of the event. The Texas Civil Justice League is affiliated with Philip Morris, which maintains a representative on the organization’s board of directors. Wayne helped the industry stop a bill this session that would have repealed the tobacco barons’ special exemption from product liability suits.

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The tobacco industry has a long history of spending its money to curry political favor. According to Ethics filings, the tobacco industry spent up to \$935,000 on lobbyists during the recent legislative session. Philip Morris and the Tobacco Institute gave \$96,000 to the Republican Party of Texas over the last three years. Since 1991, Philip Morris has contributed \$160,000 directly to candidates for elected office in Texas.

Surveys show that the majority of Texas residents support the lawsuit filed against the tobacco companies by Texas Attorney General Dan Morales. The suit seeks to recover money spent by taxpayers for Medicaid expenses attributed to smoking-related diseases.

“Big tobacco has a history of buying its way out of political jams,” said McDonald. “The Governor should clear the air of any conflicts by making the Governor’s Mansion a tobacco-free zone.”

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