

COALITION RALLYING PUBLIC ON ANTI-TOBACCO SPENDING

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The Salt Lake Tribune. Salt Lake City, Utah: February 25, 2000. Pg. A.1

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Anti-tobacco advocates on Thursday mounted a last-ditch campaign for the public's help in persuading lawmakers to spend more money fighting tobacco in Utah.

"We hope that when the people of Utah speak, they will be able to turn this around," said Atty. Gen. Jan Graham, who is working with the anti-tobacco coalition that wants the state to spend millions more each year for prevention and cessation.

The activists announced a new television campaign to rally the public beginning Thursday night. They also set up a 24-hour toll-free number to field calls from Utahns who want to contact their representatives and senators.

The same hour the tobacco foes were announcing their plans at a news conference, lawmakers were beginning debate on a bill to divvy up Utah's share of the national tobacco settlement for long-term and short-term use. The bill had been idle since Jan. 15 and waiting for the majority Republicans to come up with their own blueprint for spending about \$30 million a year expected from the settlement.

Senate Bill 15 includes \$4 million for anti-tobacco efforts, \$3 million additional spending and \$1 million to replace state Health Department programs trimmed from ongoing budgets. While that sum is \$1 million more than the day-old version anti-tobacco activists were discussing, it still falls short of the \$10 million minimum the activists say is needed to do the job.

The measure also compromises with conservative lawmakers adamant about stowing all of the money in a trust fund. It provides for stashing half of all the tobacco money into a general-purpose trust fund, from which lawmakers could spend only interest income in the future.

The bill also pledges \$5.5 million to subsidize the children's health insurance program, \$2 million to drug and tobacco courts and \$4 million for cancer research at the University of Utah. It would give legislators free rein with whatever money remains each year of the spendable half of the tobacco money.

"It's a good, conservative approach," said sponsoring Sen. Steve Poulton, R-Holladay. "It will deal with the issues realistically."

Legislative leaders remained unflustered by the new anti-tobacco campaign, which resembles an effort that prodded them last year into doubling tobacco tax revenues for anti-smoking efforts to \$500,000.

"I don't have a problem with her [Graham] weighing in on this," said House Speaker Marty Stephens. "We feel comfortable with our package."

"If I was able to manipulate the press like she does," said Senate President Lane Beattie, "I'd be successful."

Political overtones like those were everywhere in the Capitol on Thursday.

In the House, conservative Republicans vowed to hold fast to plans for putting all the money into a trust fund. Their Senate counterparts steadfastly backed Poulton's half-and-half approach.

In the office of Graham, Utah's sole statewide Democrat, anti-tobacco advocates described their disgust with the Republican governor and legislative leaders for seeming to ignore their concern that Utah is about to miss its best chance to stub out smoking forever.

They point to polls and surveys that show the public wants the tobacco money spent on health education.

A recent Salt Lake Tribune opinion survey shows 36 percent of Utahns want the tobacco money used primarily for public schools. Twenty percent said it should go largely to smoking prevention and 19 percent said it should be for smoking-related health care.

"We believed in our hearts the Legislature would do the right thing," said Beverly May of the American Cancer Society in Utah. "We thought this would be the easiest decision they would make this year."