

## **TOBACCO FUNDS FOR DRUG COURTS?**

Lucinda Dillon and Dennis Romboy

*Deseret News*. Salt Lake City, Utah: December 8, 1999. Pg. B04

Copyright *Deseret News* December 8, 1999

FARMINGTON -- Jeff and LeAnn Thomas have been clean for 10 months.

In an emotional statement Tuesday before video cameras and a full courtroom, the married couple said a drug court and 2nd District Judge Jon Memmott saved their lives. The Thomases, who held their 6-year-old son Austin, told their story to help Gov. Mike Leavitt hammer home the main point of his \$41.2 million crime reduction budget: more money for drug courts. Funding for the special courts are the highlight of Leavitt's proposed budget for fiscal year 2001, which provides his much anticipated recommendations for spending \$31.6 million anticipated from the federal tobacco settlement.

The Thomases and three Davis County former drug users helped Leavitt make the pitch to spend \$5 million to expand drug courts statewide and give other drug users a chance to turn their lives around.

The courts, which operate now as pilot programs in Salt Lake, Davis and Uintah counties, depend on federal grants. The proposal would give the lightly funded programs a major shot in the arm.

From a courtroom in the new Davis County Justice Complex, Leavitt said this is a critical element toward his ambitious goal for cutting Utah substance abuse in half by 2010.

"If we could make one change that would fundamentally alter the nature of government and society, that change would be to eliminate substance abuse," he said.

Leavitt also presented a menu of programs he would support. His list included the following:

\$16.3 for a trust fund

\$10 million donation to the Huntsman Cancer Institute.

\$8.5 million for Medicaid \$5.5 million for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

Leavitt said he would support replacing the hospital tax with tobacco settlement dollars to fund CHIP. The governor vetoed such a measure passed by the Legislature last year, saying it was premature to commit tobacco funds before the state received them.

Anti-tobacco advocates were disappointed the governor proposed only \$3.6 million for a campaign to curb smoking. The state currently spends about \$500,000 a year on tobacco prevention and cessation.

"It's far under what is needed. We're still shooting for that \$16 million in order to put that program into an effort that will work," said James Jordan, American Cancer Society spokesman.

Leavitt's proposed budget targets substance abuse in three areas: people in jails, people on public assistance and youths.

The Legislature has already thrown up a red flag about spending tobacco dollars at all.

Leavitt on Tuesday acknowledged some complications and uncertainty regarding the funds.

Confusion about funding should be cleared up by the end of the 2000 legislative session, Leavitt said, adding the state has to be "cautious about the way we budget these dollars."