

TOBACCO MONEY IS FINALLY METED OUT, HALF GOES TO HEALTH PROGRAMS AND HALF TO A TRUST FUND

Dennis Romboy

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The tug of war over Utah's tobacco settlement ended with the money being pulled in several different directions and almost no one getting exactly what they wanted.

"We all have different ideas how this money should be spent," said Rep. Jeff Alexander, R-Orem, during the final debate on how to divvy up more than \$26 million the state anticipates receiving this year. Lawmakers also wrangled over another \$9 million currently tied up in a legal dispute over attorneys fees in the successful nationwide lawsuit against the tobacco industry. After days of shuttling various versions of SB15 between the Senate and House, legislators finally agreed on a plan to spend half on health-related programs and save half in a constitutionally protected trust fund. "I think it was the right thing to do," said sponsoring Sen. Steve Poulton, R-Holladay.

The Utah Department of Health will see a \$4 million infusion for tobacco prevention and cessation programs. It intends to expand its FIT KIDS program in the elementary schools, while bolstering its secondary school intervention programs and providing cessation services to pregnant women to reduce low birthweight babies. A quarter of the money will trickle down to local health departments.

Legislators waffled on how much to commit to anti-smoking programs. But Beverly May of the American Cancer Society said she was pleased with where it ended up.

"This provides us with a good base to build up Utah's programs, she said.

May credited a weekend television ad campaign that encouraged residents to demand more money for tobacco prevention. More than 1,800 calls from smokers and nonsmokers alike who don't want to see more children become addicted to cigarettes made the difference, she said.

The \$4 million is well short of what anti-tobacco advocates, including Attorney General Jan Graham, lobbied for, but May said she hopes the Legislature will devote more money in the future. Under the bill, the first \$2 million freed in the court battle over attorneys fees would go to prevention.

Democrats complained bitterly that not nearly enough went into prevention, given that 8,000 Utah children start smoking each year. "We're basically turning our back on an entire generation," said House Minority Leader Dave Jones, D-Salt Lake City.

Republican conservatives griped that the bills spend too much money on programs that lawmakers might not be able to fund in the future if the tenuous tobacco money dries up. "Every dime we spend here will end up in a tax increase," warned Rep. Richard Walsh, R-Cottonwood Heights.