

## **WHERE, OH, WHERE WILL TOBACCO \$\$ GO?**

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*Deseret News. Salt Lake City, Utah: November 1, 2000. Pg. A12*

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Somewhere on the November ballot, tucked between the big questions like who will be president and whether to make English Utah's official language, there's the matter of how to spend nearly \$1 billion.

Proposition No. 2, which determines what will be done with the state's tobacco-settlement money, has received little attention in the weeks leading up to the election.

"In order to get important programs funded, we need something that gives us long-term expectation of secure income," said state Sen. Steve Poulton, R-Holladay, one of the proposition's main supporters. "We felt that it was prudent to set something up that would give us a permanent funding stream."

But opponents say the trust fund is just a way to divert money away from programs that would stop teen smoking, fund cancer research and set up special drug courts. The funds come from the 1998 settlement between 44 states and the tobacco industry. Utah expects to receive \$983 million in the next 25 years.

"Although a trust fund sounds like a good idea, the problem is that there are no restrictions," said state minority leader Dave Jones, D-Salt Lake City. "I think it's a roundabout way of putting money into a trust fund that can be used for any purpose — road debt, whatever — rather than for its original intent."

The trust-fund proposal, which passed in the final days of last year's Legislature, needs voter approval because it will amend the Utah Constitution.

Under the plan, half of the tobacco money for the next three years will go into the trust fund, as will 60 percent of all payments starting in July of 2003.

Lawmakers can spend half of the fund's interest any way they want, while the other half must stay in the account to add to its principle.

If approved by voters, the fund will start out in January with an estimated \$17.8 million, according to the Legislative Fiscal Analyst. An additional \$18.4 would be deposited over the first 18 months, with interest earnings for that period estimated at \$3.1 million.

In their bill, lawmakers allocated another \$15.5 million from that first installment toward health and prevention, with \$3 million to be spent on tobacco-prevention programs.

Jones and his fellow Democrats say that's not enough to combat tobacco use in Utah, where one in 10 deaths are attributed to tobacco — despite having the nation's lowest smoking rate at 14.7 percent, compared to more than 23 percent nationally.

They cite reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta that assert Utah needs to spend \$15 to \$30 million on tobacco prevention to have a tangible impact.

"In the meantime, we have one of the highest rates of young people taking up tobacco as any state," Jones said. "We're writing off a generation."

And they mention Utah's teen smoking rate, which has increased 52.2 percent since 1984, from 9 percent to 14.9 percent today.

But Republican lawmakers, who passed the proposal, say so many projects need that money that the bulk of it would be diverted from tobacco suppression, trust fund or not. Poulton, who sponsored the measure in the Senate, said the trust fund would protect the money from being divvied up by special interests. "There's been some argument that if we don't create this fund and save this 50 percent, that the 50 percent will be spent on tobacco cessation and drug intervention," Poulton said. "That's a dream world, that's not the reality of politics. It'll just go where the power is."