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# Will 100,000 Montanans' Health Care Go Up in Smoke?

A Column by Evan Barrett

October 24, 2018

With a record \$17 million of Big Tobacco money flooding Montana, each of the 100,000 Montanans' covered by Medicaid expansion has \$170 of that blood money dedicated to burning their healthcare policy up in smoke. Big Tobacco is trying to buy Montana in a cynical, immoral attempt to bolster their market and profits to the detriment of Montana families.

On the ballot is the Healthy Montana Initiative, I-185, continuing coverage for those 100,000 Montanans. Those 100,000 Montanans likely include someone you know - family, friend, co-worker or neighbor. Someone with cancer or a childhood disease or a life-threatening chronic condition.

A front group called Montanans Against Tax Hikes (cleverly called MATH) is spending over \$17 million dollars advancing bogus arguments to convince Montanans that we should not care about our fellow citizens. Who is masquerading as MATH?

You might remember them as the lineup of tobacco executives who stood before Congress and told bald-faced lie after bald-faced lie to Congress and the American people, falsely claiming they did not knowingly use the addictive powers of nicotine to hook millions of Americans into buying their deadly cancer-causing tobacco products. Deadly profit over the lives of millions.

You might remember them as the tobacco industry that paid certain scientists to produce bogus pseudo-studies to claim that cigarettes were not causing cancer. They spent millions for fake studies to continue to reap billions in blood money profits as Americans continued to die.

You might remember how Big Tobacco polished its techniques on Madison Avenue, using unknowing athletes, celebrities and even cartoons to lure young people into tobacco addiction, hoping to hook them for life -- albeit a shortened life likely to end with cancer or other life-threatening diseases.

Well, now Big Tobacco is in Montana, pretending to be Montanans. MATH, Montanans Against Tax Hikes, is really Phillip Morris USA and other cigarette companies. Do your math. They're spending over \$17 million in blood money to keep Montanans from taxing tobacco to continue health care for 100,000 Montanans currently covered under the Montana HELP Act Medicaid expansion passed in 2015. Big Tobacco places their deadly profits over your lives, and this time all the victims will be your fellow Montanans.

Big Tobacco's arguments don't hold water. But they advance multiple bogus arguments like throwing spaghetti against the wall just to see what sticks -- and Big Tobacco has

\$17 million of spaghetti to throw. For example, they claim the Healthy Montana Initiative collects way too much from Montanans while in the same ad complain that it doesn't spend enough on veterans. Big Tobacco claims that all Montanans will pay through the nose while the reality is that as a tobacco tax, only tobacco users will pay. They claim the initiative is an unconstitutional appropriation when it is, in fact, an earmarked tax that has to be appropriated each two years by the Legislature before it can be spent. But we are asked to believe that Big Tobacco cares about Montana's Constitution.

How are Phillip Morris and Big Tobacco able to do this since it's been clear for over 100 years that Montanans want no part of the corrupt corporate campaigning that Big Tobacco is doing here in 2018. Back in 1912, 76% of Montanans voted in the Corrupt Practices Act prohibiting corporate campaign contributions of any kind. One hundred years later, in 2012, 75% of Montanans passed Initiative 166 declaring that Montana's policy is that corporations are not people and money is not free speech.

But in 2010 the US Supreme Court, in the infamous "Citizens United" case, essentially tore down most of Montana's barriers to corporate campaign spending. That case asserted that money was free speech and empowered corporations, like people, to use that free speech in elections.

What are we to do? Long term, Citizens United needs to be reversed. That will not be easy and is not in our span of control.

But we here in Montana, within the boundaries of our own state, can control our own destiny by saying NO to Big Tobacco. By voting in favor of I-185, the Healthy Montana Initiative, we can stop Big Tobacco from burning the health care of 100,000 Montanans up in smoke.

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*Evan Barrett, who lives in historic Uptown Butte, retired in 2017 after 48 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He is an award-winning producer of Montana history films who continues to write columns and occasionally teaches Montana history and contributes to community and economic development projects.*

(700 words in the body)