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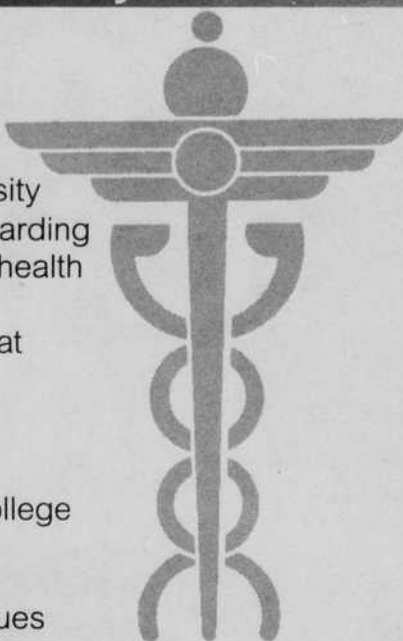
Applications can be picked up at the University Health Center front desk.

Completed applications should be submitted to the University Health Center Director's office by April 29. Please call 346-4447 for more information.



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Panel considers appropriation of tobacco money

BY NIKI SULLIVAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — A bill that would fund tobacco prevention and education programs with money from a legal settlement with tobacco companies is under consideration by a House health panel.

The bill, which would set aside 10 percent of a major settlement reached in 1998 with big tobacco, had its first public hearing Wednesday in the House Health and Human Services Committee.

The settlement between Philip Morris USA, R.J. Reynolds, Brown & Williamson (which has since merged with RJR to form Reynolds American Inc.) and Lorillard Tobacco Co. and 46 states resulted in \$206 billion to settle lawsuits over tobacco-related lawsuits.

But there was no requirement that the money be spent on tobacco-related programs, and so far, none of Oregon's money has been used on prevention or education.

Supporters of the bill say that goes against the settlement's intent.

A report from the Government Accountability Office, however, shows that many states have used the settlement money to cover budget holes.

The March report showed that the 46 states received about \$9.7 billion in 2004, and used the largest portion, 44 percent, to address budget shortfalls.

"The money has been seen as a windfall for the state to be used to plug up budget holes with no regard to the original intent of the lawsuit," said John Valley of the American Heart Association, who testified in support of the bill.

Instead, the money has been used for state bonds, the Oregon Health

Plan, Oregon Health & Sciences University programs, and a small amount to make sure other tobacco companies are following the terms of the settlement.

Valley said while tobacco advertising has increased since the settlement, the state's budget troubles in 2003 caused a decline in state spending.

Sue Fratt of the American Lung Association of Oregon said Oregon is playing into the hand of big tobacco by patching budget holes with the money rather than spending it on prevention and education.

"This is exactly the fiscal strategy that the tobacco companies were hoping for: the enormous settlement does not help one single smoker quit nor does it deter one single potential smoker from starting," she said.

No one testified in opposition to the bill.

But Rep. Billy Dalto, committee chairman, said it's a complicated issue because the money has been used to fund other important programs, and setting aside 10 percent could mean cuts to those areas.

The committee did not take action on the bill, and Dalto, a Salem Republican, said he has no plans to schedule the bill for another public hearing in the near future.

"I think there's a little bit of work to still be done on this bill," Dalto said.

Dalto said questions were raised during Wednesday's testimony over whether there was money left in the settlement to implement the bill.

Dalto also said the matter might be up to the Legislature's budget writing panel to decide because the state might be counting on that money.

IN BRIEF

Forest Service asked to halt salvage logging

GRANTS PASS — Gov. Ted Kulongoski asked the U.S. Forest Service to hold off selling timber killed by the 2002 Biscuit fire in areas that were put off-limits to logging during the Clinton administration.

In a letter to Regional Forester Linda Goodman dated April 1, the governor argued that logging in so-called roadless areas before a lawsuit brought by environmentalists is decided violates the public trust at a time when tensions are already high over cutting old-growth forests.

Kulongoski added that his own administrative challenge to the logging plan raised issues similar to those in the lawsuit, which he felt had a good chance of prevailing in court.

"He feels it would really be in Oregon's best interest and the Forest Service's best interest to wait," Mike Carrier, the governor's natural resources adviser, said Wednesday.

Last month when demonstrators were trying to stop logging in old-growth forest reserves burned by Biscuit, the Siskiyou National Forest said it expected to offer the first of the timber sales in roadless areas before the end of March. But there has been no

new word on when the first auction would be scheduled.

"Right now the plans are to go ahead and offer (the timber sale)," said Rex Holloway, spokesman for the Forest Service Northwest regional office in Portland. "But as far as when, that what's in question right now."

Sparked by lightning, the Biscuit fire burned 500,000 acres in the summer of 2002. It has since become a battle — with the Bush administration and the timber industry on one side, and environmental groups and some Democrats on the other — over how best to restore the forest and habitat critical to the northern spotted owl and salmon.

Under pressure from the timber industry, the Siskiyou National Forest greatly expanded its original plans for cutting fire-killed timber to pay for restoration, moving beyond lands designated primarily for logging into old growth reserves designated primarily for fish and wildlife habitat and roadless areas.

Don Smith of the Siskiyou Regional Education Project, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said the Forest Service appears to be waiting to sell timber in roadless areas until the Bush administration's new policy opening roadless areas to logging goes into effect later this year.

—The Associated Press



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