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news

BY ALAN PITTMAN

Buying Votes

Tobacco, timber, speculators spend big, TV profits

Can Oregon voters be bought? That's what the tobacco corporations are banking on. The Phillip Morris and RJ Reynolds tobacco companies have contributed a record \$10 million to defeat Measure 50, a tax on cigarettes that would go to fund children's health care.

The timber barons and land speculators hoping to cash in on Measure 37 are also hoping their money will buy votes. Led by the loggers, the opponents of Measure 49, the Measure 37 reform referred by the Legislature, have contributed \$1.8 million.

Combine that money with the pro-measure spending, and total campaign money this election could top a record \$20 million. That beats 2006, when 10 state measures attracted \$18 million in campaign cash.

Most of the money this year is going to pay TV stations to spew ads at voters. Many of the ads are highly misleading.

The tobacco corporations claim that Measure 50 will sully Oregon's pristine Constitution. But the state Constitution already has been amended 240 times, and many of those amendments were relatively trivial.

In fact, the Legislature was forced into referring a constitutional amendment because of an existing amendment requiring a supermajority vote for tax increases. The tobacco lobby, which has spent a half-million dollars in the last couple years buying legislators with contributions and lobbying, made sure that supermajority wasn't there in Salem.

The real motivation for big tobacco to pour millions into defeating the measure lies elsewhere. Studies have shown that higher cigarette taxes induce more people to stop smoking, reducing profits on the tobacco corporation's cancerous products.

The state's timber and land barons are waging a similarly misleading campaign against Measure 49, claiming it will repeal Measure 37 and allow government to seize land without compensation. In fact, some environmentalists have complained that the measure won't repeal the pro-sprawl Measure 37. The measure also won't allow property seizure, which is already prohibited by the state and federal constitutions anyway.

The most misleading part about the anti-49 and 50 TV ads may be that they don't disclose that the tobacco and timber companies are behind the curtain. The tobacco corporations call themselves "Oregonians Against the Blank Check." The timber and land barons call one of their PACs "Stop Taking Our Property."

Newspapers have revealed the misleading messages and timber and tobacco funding. But with readership long declining, many Oregonians only get their news from TV. Critics have long said TV news has become ever more superficial and entertainment-focused with little time for real news that informs voters.

Ironically, while TV news has declined,

stations are cashing in on political advertising. Local TV and radio broadcasters have reaped a \$2.2 million windfall while kids struggle for health care and the state struggles to save its natural beauty from sprawl. KVAL TV has cashed in on about \$1.1 million in political ads since July, according to state contribution reporting data. KEZI made \$363,000, KMTR \$356,000 and KLSR/KEVU \$114,000.

The Oregonian reported Oct. 30 that with all the political ads, Portland stations are reaping higher rates that capture the higher demand than supply for prime ad times.

Local radio stations also cashed in on political ads. McKenzie River Broadcasting (KMGE, KKNU, KEUG) made about \$108,000, Clear Channel (KFLY, KOOL, KPNW, KDUK, KODZ) made \$90,000 and Cumulus (KZEL, KNRQ, STAR, KUGN) made \$57,000.

Despite all the ads, voters appear to be tuning out the election. Low ballot returns so far mean that turnout could drop below 50 percent, according to elections officials.

Locally, 20 percent of ballots have been returned as of Oct. 29 compared to 21 percent statewide. The low turnout is despite a hot Eugene measure to spend \$40 million or more on subsidies for redevelopment downtown. Supporters of the urban renewal Measure 20-134 have raised a total of \$44,000 in contributions. The *Eugene Weekly* has received approximately \$7,000 for both pro- and anti- ads for Measure 20-134.

Much of the pro-20-134 money comes from property owners and speculators who will make millions on purchase options the city has signed. The \$16 million in options promise to pay two to four times the assessed real market value for downtown property targeted by the redevelopment. The city has so far refused a request to make all the option prices public before the election.

EW

Broadcasters Cash in on Political Ads

KVAL	\$1,114,872
KEZI	\$363,136
KMTR	\$356,087
KLSR/KEVU Fox	\$113,558
McKenzie River Broadcasting (radio)	\$108,259
Clear Channel (radio)	\$89,963
Cumulus Eugene (radio)	\$57,095
Total	\$2,202,970

Source: State data on political expenditures since July.