

Big tobacco suit hypocritical

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During President Clinton's administration, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit against five of the biggest tobacco companies in the country: Philip Morris USA, R.J. Reynolds, Lorillard Tobacco, Brown & Williamson and the Liggett Group. They are currently seeking \$289 billion in damages, up from the 1998 settlement of \$206 billion. According to an article on CNN.com, the government is projected to win this case against Big Tobacco.

Although billions of dollars are involved, this lawsuit should be considered a joke. The government should not be suing the tobacco companies when they have profited so much from them. It is hypocritical to publicly attack these five companies when government officials receive millions of dollars in campaign contributions. According to commoncause.org, from Jan. 1, 1995 to Nov. 27, 2000 Philip Morris gave \$10,921,208 to Federal Candidates and National

Party Committees. R.J. Reynolds gave \$4,704,427 in hard and soft money during the same time period. Brown & Williamson gave \$2,886,521, and Lorillard Tobacco Company gave \$606,050. According to one estimate from the same website, starting from 1995, tobacco companies have

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donated over \$30 million to politicians and their respective parties. This amount of money allows Big Tobacco to exert its influence on governmental policies and positions, and they did just that.

For example, in 1998 John McCain's (R-Az) anti-tobacco bill was voted down. The more than 40 senators that voted no received on average quadruple the amount of money from tobacco companies than did the senators who voted in favor of the bill. It is obvious that tobacco

companies have a distinct voice in Congress, more than most Americans do.

It seems that Big Tobacco has teamed up with the United States government. Why then is the United States Justice Department going after Big Tobacco? It does not make any sense. On the side, officials accept money, but they publicly go after these companies. The government is on both sides of this issue. They want to continue lining their pockets with tobacco money, but they also want to collect billions of dollars in reparations. This in turn would make the public look favorably upon them.

If the government really wants to take a stand against Big Tobacco and how it harms public health, its leaders should stop accepting campaign contributions. The federal government needs to choose a side. Campaign finance reform would be a good idea. Tobacco money should be limited if not eliminated before the government collects any of that almost \$300 billion. If the officials continue to accept millions of dollars on the side, this Big Tobacco lawsuit will continue to look like a joke.