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A look at the state's most effective lobbyists, their tactics and results

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last article in a three-part series looking at the influence of lobbyists on the Idaho Legislature.

BOISE -- Last year, a Virginia company that makes America's best-selling cigarette brand spent more money lobbying Idaho lawmakers and officials than any other group.

A Post Register review of more than 2,500 pages of disclosure forms available through the Secretary of State's Office found that the Altria Group spent \$165,076 lobbying in 2011. The Altria Group is the parent company of Phillip Morris, which manufactures Marlboro cigarettes.

Altria was the only organization to spend more than \$100,000 on lobbying expenses, spending 82 percent more than the next biggest spender, the Idaho Education Association, which coughed up \$90,366. Altria spent \$3,814 on food and entertainment for state officials and lawmakers during the year.

Specifically, Altria provided \$2,500 for Republican Reps. JoAn Wood (Rigby), Lawrence Denney (Midvale) and Ken Roberts (Donnelly) to attend Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's inauguration festivities. Altria also spent \$265 on Ketchum hotel rooms for Sen. Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls, and Rep. Jim Guthrie, R-McCammon, in September. The rest of Altria's money, \$161,262, was classified as "other expenses and services."

Those who follow Idaho politics remember that Blackfoot Republican Rep. Dennis Lake pledged to carry a bill in 2011 that would increase the state's cigarette tax. But the session adjourned without any official consideration of the issue. Lake said the bill never materialized because he couldn't secure the votes to get it out of his own committee, which is crowded with fellow Republicans. Wood and Roberts sit on Lake's House Revenue and Tax Committee, while Denney serves as speaker of the House.

Idaho, meanwhile, has the lowest cigarette tax in the region, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. At 57 cents per pack, Idaho's tobacco tax is lower than 41 other states.

So, did Altria's lobbying hinder Lake's efforts? "Obviously it does," Lake said. "We're still struggling trying to find the votes to get the bill out of committee. I think the (legislative) body is being lobbied heavily."

All told, 19 lobbyists spent more than \$10,000 on behalf of their clients last year. Notable expenses included dinners for lawmakers at Boise's Chandlers Steakhouse (which offers a \$62 porterhouse steak "for two" on its menu), a night out at the 122-year-old members-only Arid Club and catered receptions at hotel ballrooms.

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe, for example, spent \$23,000 after inviting all lawmakers to a reception at Boise's Grove Hotel in February 2011.