

Nicotine

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country," says. "We're now up to 19 states that have smoke-free workplace laws and dozens more cities and counties around the country," said CTFK Spokesperson Vince Willmore.

But the tobacco lobby is fighting back — hard. "The challenge is that the tobacco industry continues to spend millions of dollars each year on lobbying, on campaign contributions; so, there's still the need to overcome all the money that the industry spends," said Willmore.

The spending gets especially heavy when Congress — or a particular state — begins major legislation.

For example, in 2003, when Congress began debating the issue of tobacco regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for the first time in five years, the tobacco industry spent about \$10.6 million over a period of only six months to lobby lawmakers, according to a report by Common Cause and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Action Fund.

The report estimated that the money amounted to \$116,000 for each day Congress was in session. That \$10.6 million was on top of the \$1.1 million that the tobacco industry gave in political contributions during the first nine months of the 2003-2004 and the \$9.4 million the companies had given in earlier congressional elections in 2002, the report stated. The bill for FDA regulation of tobacco failed.

Votes of legislators often appear to coincide with major financial contributions

from big tobacco companies. Last year, the House Judiciary Committee was about to vote on a bill that would prevent foreign countries from suing tobacco companies that knowingly smuggle cigarettes across their borders.

Cigarette money poured into the committee, the top three highest recipients being Reps. Randy Forbes (R-Va.), \$43,124; Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), \$31,090 and Howard Coble (R-N.C.), \$29,500, all of whom voted yes for the bill, which ultimately passed.

Rep. John Conyers Jr., (D-Mich.) then-ranking member of the committee, which he now chairs, issued a scathing rebuke to his colleagues.

"This bill is nothing more than a tobacco giveaway," he said in a statement. "Our government has taken steps to stem the tide of smoking in the United States, but this bill would allow us to ignore the situation in the rest of the world by giving cigarette companies a blank check to export illegal and cheap cigarettes to other nations. I strongly object to the majority's blatant pandering to big tobacco."

Still, the number of state

legislatures passing anti-smoking laws are increasing, mainly due to the fact that voters want them.

"Our polling has shown that the public supports smoke-free workplace laws, supports higher tobacco taxes; and they want governments to fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs," said Willmore.

"On the one hand, you've got strong public support for actions to reduce smoking. And then you've got elected officials who want to do the right thing. On the other hand, you've got the industry spending a lot of money to try and block affective action."

So far, in the U.S., the following states have passed smoke-free laws that include restaurants and bars: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois (effective January 1, 2008), Maine, Maryland (effective February 1, 2008), Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico (effective June 15), New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont and Washington, according to CTFK. Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico have also

passed such laws.

As the tobacco industry appears to lose the fight against smoke-free workplace laws, they go direct with money into communities perceived as vulnerable, particularly, the Black community.

"The fraternities, the political associations, to African-American caucuses at the state level, at the national level, the Black Caucus, community programs, and cultural programs. They blanket the African-American community," said Robert Robertson, a medical doctor and former associate director of the Office of Minority Health at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

According to White, who is a grandmother, where laws may not stop her from smoking, her love for family can.

"When I went to my grandson's for a week, I didn't smoke. But the minute I got home, I bought a pack of cigarettes," she confesses. "I know I can quit, I just haven't yet."

Hazel Trice Edney is Washington Correspondent for the NNPA News Service. Aria White is a special correspondent.

Your Horoscope Says...May 10-May 16

ARIES

Feeling bold, are we? Well, go with the flow of your feelings! No other sign can call on inner courage as easily as you. Whether at home, at work, or out on the town, let your personal statements be stylish and bold!

Soul Affirmation: What I need to be is fully present inside of me.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 15, 40

TAURUS

It's a great week to tell somebody you're close to that you love them. Saying it aloud gives you energy and, of course, your designated adoree will be delighted. Keep the big picture in mind this week, and you'll feel completely buoyant.

Soul Affirmation: I listen to the sweet music of the life all around me.

Lucky Numbers: 26, 31, 42

GEMINI

Your energy level is up and you can get a lot done on a creative project. What you put your time and energy into is what you love, so treat yourself lovingly. What you create expresses who you are. What you wear is also an important communication.

Soul Affirmation: I get joy from giving good things.

Lucky Numbers: 13, 39, 41

CANCER

Remember that exercise is a wonderful tension-reliever if things get too intense this week. Walking over your lunch hours could make all the difference in the world. Love yourself and reward yourself with perfect health and happiness.

Soul Affirmation: I flavor my life with good wishes towards everyone this week.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 28, 52

LEO

An unexpected invitation may arrive. Say yes, get dressed, and go! You'll have a good time and you may meet a kindred spirit while you are out. A very special week is yours when you take the time to reveal your special-ness to someone.

Soul Affirmation: I am a giver of good words this week.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 23, 50

VIRGO

Love is moving in every direction. Whichever way you look, you'll see manifestations of love. That's because you have so much love in your heart. In this sense, love is like a perfume; you won't be able to give some away without getting some on you.

Soul Affirmation: I focus on long-range

financial security this week.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 31, 42

LIBRA

Personal finance stays in focus this week, and you'll be looking at new ways of creating and managing wealth. If you keep your mind open to the flow of abundance, you're sure to be happily surprised this week.

Soul Affirmation: I give love, and love gives to me.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 29, 55

SCORPIO

The possibility exists that you've temporarily overlooked a powerful way of increasing your income. Still your mind and let your spirit guide you toward a perfect solution to a vexing situation.

Soul Affirmation: Money opens doors for friendship to enter.

Lucky Numbers: 10, 29, 46

SAGITTARIUS

An older female may extend something valuable to you, and you'll be very glad about what you receive. Possibilities seem endless this week, and you'll want to refresh your outlook about a particular project that suddenly looks lucrative again.

Soul Affirmation: I fill my mind with visions of love this week.

Lucky Numbers: 40, 47, 52

CAPRICORN

A burst of enthusiasm will carry you through the early part of the work week, and with a positive outlook, you'll be very happy with what you've accomplished at the end of the week. Have a heap of fun!

Soul Affirmation: I let my mind go slack and tighten up my body.

Lucky Numbers: 33, 38, 41

AQUARIUS

Expect some surprises this week. You'll be very happy about at least one of them. Stay flexible and you'll be in the right place at the right moment, every moment. You'll want to celebrate at home in the evenings.

Soul Affirmation: I find many things about myself that I really love.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 25, 31

PISCES

Success is a series of small steps. The baby steps you take each week toward your dream will move you closer and closer to your vision. Keep taking those little steps and expect to hear some good news about a big project.

Soul Affirmation: Helping others is the true measure of my worth.

Lucky Numbers: 27, 44, 47

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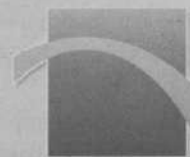
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