

Congressmen Tee Off for Fun, Profit

Tobacco Lobby Offers Free Golf, Travel, Honoraria to 27 in House

By Charles R. Babcock
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INDIAN WELLS, Calif.—In faraway Washington on the morning of Jan. 11, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop issued a 25th-anniversary report on smoking and health, attacking cigarettes as the leading cause of preventable death among Americans.

Hours later, 27 members of Congress began arriving at the plush Hyatt Grand Champions Resort for up to four days of free lodging, food, golf and tennis with top executives of the tobacco industry who were gathered here amid the palms and snow-capped mountains of Palm Springs for the Tobacco Institute's annual Legislative Conference.

The irony "didn't go unmentioned," said Michael Kerrigan, a lobbyist for the Smokeless Tobacco Council.

Many lawmakers came with wives and some with children for what amounted to a nearly free family vacation. Most members also went home with some extra spending money—\$1,000 to \$2,000 in speaking fees, or honoraria, for participating with several colleagues in one of three 90-minute panel discussions.

Because of the widespread perception that honoraria are used by interest groups to buy access to

lawmakers, Congress is under pressure to ban such payments as part of a controversial pay-raise package that would give members a 50 percent salary increase, to \$135,000 a year. The House leadership is drafting legislation that would ban honoraria, but it has not decided whether to curb trips to conferences that are little more than free vacations.

The workload at the tobacco meeting wasn't particularly heavy. The panel discussions before about 125 growers, manufacturers and distributors ended each day by 11:30 a.m., in part so that golfers could tee off at noon on the courses next to the hotel. (Foursomes generally included one or two members of Congress and industry representatives. The Tobacco Institute picked up the \$40 greens fees.)

The rest of the time, lawmakers and their families sampled—at no charge—the resort's other amenities, including champagne and orange juice when checking in, 12 tennis courts, several heated swimming pools, a health club and five restaurants, including Jasmine, where the fixed-price meal was \$45 or \$55 a person and entrees averaged \$25.

Given the cost of air fare (more than \$1,000 for a round-trip coach ticket from Washington), the comfortable suites (about \$300 a night for the ordinary guest

and meal expenses, the dollar values of several days spent here easily exceeded the members' speaking fees. A spokesman for the Tobacco Institute said, however, that the group "had not been asked and did not pay" expenses for any children.

Under Senate and House rules, members can accept expenses for travel, food and lodging for themselves—and a spouse or aide—from groups sponsoring their appearances at such events. Expenses "for the personal benefit of the reporting individual," such as a vacation, must be disclosed as a "gift," House rules say. Members aren't allowed to take more than \$100 in gifts from lobbyists or others with a direct interest in legislation.

Over the past several years, some members have ignored these limits, turning speaking engagements into free vacations of a week or more during periods when Congress is in recess. In 1987, according to a Common Cause study of trips lasting at least three days, more than 450 members of Congress reported receiving reimbursements. Altogether, the numbers of days covered by reimbursements added up to 11 years, the study found.

A ban on honoraria is unlikely to affect conferences such as this one. "We pick the location for our own members, and we'll continue to have our meetings here," a spokesman for the Tobacco Institute said over lunch on the patio of one Grand Champions restaurant. "Hopefully, members of Congress who are invited would attend."

Rep. Harold Volkmer (D-Mo.) said he might do just that. "I wouldn't refuse to come because there wasn't any honoraria," he said after finishing a round of golf.

For those House and Senate members who take part in conferences in resort areas, January is a busy month because Congress is not in session much of the time. And Palm Springs is a busy place. A number of annual conferences take place here during the same week as the Tobacco Institute's, capitalizing on the the Bob Hope charity golf tournament's allure for congressional golfers.

In January, lawmakers are free to attend several events in a short time, often picking up honoraria at each one.

For example, Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, played in the Hope tournament and then received honoraria for speaking to five groups meeting in the area: the tobacco conference, the Edison Electric Institute, the billboard industry, a group of public power companies and the hotel and restaurant workers' union, according to a Rostenkowski spokesman. The spokesman declined to say which group or groups paid for Rostenkowski's lodging, meals and airfare.

Hal Brown Jr., chairman of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, said his group was the first to offer honoraria to members of Congress in Palm Springs. In 1986, he said, the OAAA decided to stop sponsoring an annual conference here, concluding that OAAA members "were more interested in the golf course than [in] attending sessions."

Instead, he said, individual billboard executives were planning to hold receptions at their Palm Springs homes for Rostenkowski and another member of Congress.

But OAAA members did come to Palm Springs in full force this year, as they have done in the past. This year's get-together, however, was called "Vern Clark & Associates' First Annual Legislative Conference."

Vern Clark is the registered lobbyist for the OAAA.

According to the schedule of the "Clark" conference, it lasted seven days and featured panel discussions or meals with three senators, four members of the House and three top congressional staffers. Most received honoraria as well as expenses.

Sponsors of other traditional January getaways don't offer speaking fees but do furnish expense-paid trips to appear in charity events of corporate sponsors. For example, 18 senators and their wives were flown to Scottsdale, Ariz., for a charity tennis tournament Jan. 5-8, where they joined executives from such companies as Citibank, Dow Chemical, Morgan Stanley & Co. and Motorola.

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The next weekend, another group of senators and their wives were invited to a second charity event, Sen. Jake Garn's "Senators' Ski Cup," in Park City, Utah. That event's chief sponsors were American Express, Delta Airlines and U.S. West, a regional phone company, all of which chipped in \$40,000 or more in cash or services.

Those who attended the Tobacco Institute's conference received a booklet outlining "tobacco issues in the 101st Congress," including expected moves to legislate higher excise taxes, broader advertising bans and tougher warning labels and to extend the smoking ban on certain airline flights.

They also received detailed biographies of the members who attended, lifted without attribution from "The Almanac of American Politics." The guests included members of the House Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Public Works and Transportation committees, which have jurisdiction over the tax, labeling and airline issues.

The tobacco lobby spokesman declined to say which members of Congress were invited and why. But one industry representative who attended noted that no notable anti-smoking legislators were present. In fact, only four of the more than 20 House members who attended voted against the tobacco industry in the key 1987 vote that banned smoking on short airline flights.

Lobbyist Kerrigan, who represents the chewing tobacco and snuff industry, said he doesn't use golf outings to discuss business. "I don't think it's good to lobby a member on the golf course. On the 19th hole you can go in and visit and discuss your issue," he said.

Kerrigan teed off at 12:40 on Thursday, Jan. 12, with Rep. Bob Carr (D-Mich.) and Carlton Blalock of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, Inc. For that afternoon, the pro shop at Indian Wells Golf Resort, which is next door to the Hyatt resort, had blocked out time for 48 tobacco conference guests and had lined up a fleet of golf carts for them.

Called in his room that afternoon, Carr said he was too busy to talk at the moment.

Another of the day's golfers, Rep. Raymond J. McGrath (R-N.Y.), who also sits on the tax committee, said he participated in a panel discussion that covered several issues—including a possibility of an increase in excise taxes on cigarette sales, the tobacco industry's main concern in this session of Congress.

McGrath said he made another speech earlier in the week in Palm Springs to representatives of the Equitable real estate group and accepted honoraria from it and the tobacco lobby. He said "it would all right with me" if Congress votes to ban honoraria in return for a pay raise, but he would go on accepting speaking fees as long as they are legal.

Rep. Norman Y. Mineta (D-Calif.), another speaker at the tobacco conference, said he declined the honoraria this year because legislation to extend the smoking ban on some airline flights may come before the Public Works and Transportation aviation subcommittee that he chairs. "This gives me the ability to act freely and criticize without any implications," Mineta said.

He decided, however, that it was appropriate for the Tobacco Institute to pay his expenses at the conference, he said.

On the Saturday before the tobacco conference opened, Mineta spoke at a reception in his honor

given by Outdoor Advertising's Brown. Mineta said he accepted a fee for his appearance but had not in years when highway beautification bills affecting the billboard industry were before his committee.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), a champion of the tobacco industry, said he arrived in Palm Springs Tuesday evening and was going back to Washington early Friday on a tobacco company jet being sent east to pick up Lee Atwater, President Bush's campaign manager and new head of the Republican National Committee. Atwater spoke to the tobacco lobby Saturday morning.

Helms said he spoke to the group "about legislative strategy we'd rather not see on the front page of The Washington Post."

Helms noted that he did his honoraria speaking "on my time," when Congress is in recess. What upsets him, he said, is members of Congress missing committee or floor votes because they are "flying all over the country" making speeches for pay.

Addressing the pay raise issue in general, he said: "There's not one member of Congress who didn't know what the salary was when he was elected. It would be unconscionable to permit it to be raised along the lines recommended. I'm astonished President Reagan would do it."

Former House speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.), who was staying at Hyatt Grand Champions while playing in the Hope tournament, told a reporter in the resort lobby Thursday evening that he was going to dinner with Lee A. Iacocca and then addressing the tobacco group.

At age 76, O'Neill said he enjoys being a celebrity of sorts. "I get honoraria. I write articles. I get residuals from my book," he said.

He said he favors the honoraria ban and the pay raise, which would increase top federal pensions. "Most of these guys don't get honoraria, you know," he said. "You have to be a committee chairman" to be a popular speaker.

Three days later in Utah, at the closing banquet of the Garn charity ski race, Richard Marriott of the Marriott Corp. presented Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) with a giant nine-litre bottle of champagne to go along with the cup as captain of this year's winning team.

Gorton said he didn't want to accept the liquor but would auction it off to get additional funds for the hospital that benefits from the event. The bidding, which started at \$250, finally reached \$1,500.

When the winning bidder, Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato (R-N.Y.), went up to collect his bottle, a voice out of the crowd called "Don't kill honoraria."

Staff writer Walter Pincus and staff researcher Melissa Mathis contributed to this report.

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FORE!!!

GOLF PAIRINGS
THURSDAY

WEST COURSE - STARTING AT NOON & EVERY 7 MINUTES AFTER

- 12:00 Noon - Keenik, F.
✓ McGrath
✓ Lenc
Chilcote
- 12:07 Ave, Bob
✓ Delay
Caldwell
Strumbe
- 12:15 Ainsworth
X Schulse
Knapp
✓ Sundquist
- 12:22 Whitley
✓ Volkmr
Howard
Horton
- 12:30 Walsh
Hunt, Albert
Balden
Johnson
- 12:37 Kerrigan
X Cary
Ashy
Blalock, Carlton
- 12:45 Hilderley
Vincovich
Funk
Hinslow
- 12:52 Romik, B.
Ave, Aurora
Hunt, Max
Blalock, Corralia
- 1:00 ✓ Lancaster, Alice
McGovern
Hilderley, D.
X Sundquist, Martha

Twenty-seven members of Congress attended the Tobacco Institute's four-day meeting near Palm Springs earlier this month, participating in panel discussions that ended at midday so that golfers could tee off shortly after noon. On the schedule shown here, the names of lawmakers and their spouses are marked with an "X." Others included on the list are tobacco industry representatives. "T.I. MASTER ACCT #42490" refers to the Tobacco Institute, which paid the \$40 greens fees for the congressional guests.



THE
TOBACCO
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1989
LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE

INDIAN WELLS
GOLF RESORT

X = T.I. MASTER ACCT. #42490
ALL OTHERS ARE INDIVIDUAL

THE WASHINGTON POST



REP. HAROLD VOLKMER
... might attend without honorarium



REP. DAN ROSTENKOWSKI
... combined golf, paid appearances

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