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The tobacco settlement is bad news— even if you've never smoked a cigarette

Americans should ask themselves: Whose bad habits are next?

WASHINGTON, DC — The biggest losers in the new tobacco settlement are not the tobacco companies or America's 50 million smokers — but the 210 million Americans who *don't* smoke, the Libertarian Party said today.

"You're next," the party's national chairman, Steve Dasbach, bluntly warned America's non-smokers. "This settlement vastly expands the power of the federal government — and whatever your bad habit is, the politicians and lawyers will come after *you* next."

Under the terms of the settlement announced Friday, the tobacco industry will be forced to pay \$368 billion over 25 years, mostly to state governments and the federal government.

"This settlement establishes a perilous precedent: That the government can levy massive punitive damages against a popular product because of the so-called public health consequences," said Dasbach.

"Ask yourself: Who's next? Will the government go after the fast-food industry for selling fatty hamburgers? Ban dangerous sports like skate-boarding? Outlaw alcohol again? Make it illegal to get a suntan? Thanks to this settlement, your right to choose may go up in smoke."

An equally frightening aspect of the settlement, said Dasbach, is the government's all-out assault on free speech in the name of restricting tobacco advertising.

"If Congress ratifies this agreement, Americans will suffer from the second-hand smoke of the Bill of Rights being torched," he said. "In their frenzy to control tobacco, politicians want to drastically restrict the First Amendment."

The agreement bans tobacco advertising on billboards or the Internet, and makes it illegal to sell clothes that feature cigarette brand names.

"This is a free speech issue, plain and simple," said Dasbach. "Even if you don't like what tobacco companies advertise, the government shouldn't have the power to outlaw t-shirts and baseball caps just because they feature the Marlboro Man."

Congress must now approve the settlement, but may debate it first for several months.

"Even if you don't smoke, don't like cigarettes, and hate the tobacco companies, you should *oppose* this agreement," said Dasbach. "You should tell the politicians that you don't approve of their blackmail of the tobacco industry, and don't like this government power grab. The only winners are lawyers and politicians. The loser is *every* American who values freedom of choice."

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