

The Do-A-Lot Congress

A DO-NOTHING CONGRESS it certainly was not. When U.S. lawmakers adjourned in October, many special interests saw their political investments pay off. Here are some of the corporate legislative coups from the 1998 Congress listed in order of industry campaign contributions. All campaign finance data includes PAC, soft money and individual contributions to federal candidates and the national parties and was downloaded from the Federal Election Commission on October 1, 1998 (includes data primarily from January 1, 1997 through June 30, 1998).

WALL STREET

Uniform standards for securities class action lawsuits, and a delay until March 30, 1999 on Commodity Futures Trading Commission rules covering swaps and derivatives. Campaign contributions: \$23.2 million.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

No regulations on either cable or phone companies to put a lid on rates. Broadcasters got between \$12 billion and \$70 billion worth of free frequencies on the broadcast spectrum and may be able to hold on to the additional airwaves indefinitely. Campaign contributions: \$14.4 million.

OIL & GAS

Eight-month delay on Interior Department rules changing the benchmarks for calculating the price oil companies must pay the government for drilling on federal land. The industry continues to seek to pay the government in-kind, rather than in cash. Contributions: \$14.3 million.

BANKS

A billion dollars in government subsidies to remain in the student loan business. Congress passed no laws requiring banks to stop double-charging consumers at ATMs. Campaign contributions: \$11.5 million.

PHARMACEUTICAL CORPS.

Passage of legislation allowing drug

and medical device manufacturers to bring their products to the market faster. The industry staved off advertising regulations for manufacturers that own pharmacy benefit management companies. Campaign contributions: \$8.3 million.

ACCOUNTANTS

Retreat by the Treasury Department on rules that would have closed a legal tax loophole that allows some multinational companies to reduce tax payments to foreign governments and avoid payments to the U.S. government on some of their overseas operations. Accountants were responsible for setting up multinational companies in this profitable tax arrangement. Campaign contributions: \$6.9 million.

HOLLYWOOD

Ratification of two World Intellectual Property Organization treaties strengthening international copyright laws and preventing piracy, and 20-year extension on copyrighted works. Campaign contributions: \$6.5 million.

TOBACCO

Defeated legislation to settle state lawsuits, regulate nicotine as a drug, limit tobacco advertising and effectively raise more than \$500 billion in tobacco taxes. Contributions: \$6.1 million.

COMPUTERS

Expansion of a foreign high-tech worker visa program, uniform standards for securities class action lawsuits, a moratorium on Internet taxes, extension of the research and development tax credit, and a tax break for software exports. Campaign donations: \$5 million.

ALCOHOL

Rejection of proposal to lower the blood-alcohol content level from .1 to .08 in determining drunk-driving violations. The industry avoided new broadcast advertising rules. Wineries are poised to get government permission to promote the benefits of moderate wine consumption. Campaign contributions: \$4.9 million.

GAMBLING/CASINOS

Withdrawal of proposal to kill the gambling tax deduction for net losses. Indian tribes staved off attacks on their sovereign status and taxes on their commercial activities at a rate of 34 percent. Industry is awaiting the results of a national commission created to study the effects of gambling due in June 1999. Contributions: \$4.1 million.

DEFENSE CONTRACTORS

Expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic — more customers for U.S. weapons, and the biggest Pentagon budget increase since the Reagan Administration. Campaign contributions: \$4 million.

AIRLINES

Effective delay until next summer of Transportation Department regulations sought by discount airlines on anti-competitive practices within the industry. Congress made little or no progress on expanding access to the nation's most crowded airports. Major airlines won a gradual decrease in the ticket tax and an increase in fees for every takeoff and landing — which hikes up the price of discount carrier fares. Contributions: \$3 million.

HEALTH CARE

No new federal regulations on managed care plans. Patients still cannot sue their health plans. Campaign contributions: \$2.1 million.

AUTOMAKERS

Two tax breaks for alternative-fuel vehicles — electric cars and cars that run on ethanol — and a continuing freeze on standards that dictate how many miles a car must go on a gallon of gas. Contributions: \$1.2 million.

MEAT PACKERS

Defeat of both a proposed one-year pilot program requiring meatpackers to make public the prices they pay livestock producers and a Clinton Administration plan to charge the industry \$570 million in user fees to fund inspections. Campaign contributions: \$850,000.

— Jennifer Shecter