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HEADLINE: A **lonely soldier in the tobacco war;**
DERRICK Z. JACKSON

BYLINE: By Derrick Z. **Jackson**, Globe Staff

BODY:

Given the prominence of the tobacco wars, Calvin Butts, pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, remains a peculiarly lonely soldier among African-Americans.

His whitewashing of cigarette billboards and getting billboard companies to move liquor and tobacco ads away from schools and churches has created more grumbling than praise among elite African-American politicians, publishers, and art directors. Most major African-American organizations receive funding or advertising revenue from big tobacco.

"I was on a plane sitting with Robert Johnson late editor of Jet magazine," Butts said Wednesday before speaking at an African-American leadership luncheon on tobacco in Boston. "He told me, 'Butts, you're causing trouble. We at the magazine have been told that we need to look at alternatives to ads from tobacco companies.' "

Despite the conversation, cigarette ads continue in glossy magazines geared for African-Americans. Joe Camel may be under siege from the Federal Trade Commission and attorneys general from 31 states, but he still found refuge this month in jazzy double-page spreads in Essence and Ebony Man. Ebony, Ebony Man, and Jet are owned by Johnson Publications.

It is no accident that major African-American politicians have yet to follow Butts's lead. Of the 39 members of the congressional Black Caucus, 21 have received at least \$ 5,000 in campaign contributions from Big Tobacco since 1986.

Ironically for Butts, his longtime congressman in Harlem is Charles Rangel. Rangel is always the first man in Washington to complain about illegal drugs flooding Harlem. But even though smoking accounts for seven times more deaths among African-Americans than drug overdoses and drug-related homicides, Rangel has said nothing about tobacco's attack on African-Americans.

Small wonder. Rangel has received \$ 47,950 in tobacco political action committee contributions since 1986, ranking him 19th in the 435-member House. Another African-American congressman from New York City, Ed Towns, is 15th on the list at \$ 51,075.

Other highly visible African-Americans in Congress who have taken at least \$ 5,000 of tobacco money: Senator Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois and Representatives Mel Watt of North Carolina, Cynthia McKinney of Georgia, Floyd Flake of New York, Carrie Meek of Florida, Louis Stokes of Ohio, J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, William Clay of Missouri, and Maxine Waters and Julian Dixon of California.

The money given to African-American politicians might seem pale next to that given to other groups. Philip Morris, for example, gave a total of \$ 1 million in 1991 to the Urban League, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Dance Theater of Harlem.

But Butts is rightfully adamant that politicians bear a special responsibility to reject tobacco money since their presumed mission is to protect their constituents from abuse. "Towns and Rangel have to say it's sheer hypocrisy," Butts said. "Especially Charles Rangel. He's been there 28 years. You've been there that long, you ought to be able to say that tobacco companies are drug dealers as much as dealers of other drugs.

"The African-American male life expectancy in Harlem is less than the life expectancy of males in Bangladesh. Rangel is a stable, strong, a ranking member of Congress. Why not say, 'Let's get out here and fight this thing?'"

It is harder for Butts to openly criticize organizations such as the United Negro College Fund. In 1988, the UNCF received \$ 424,000 from big tobacco. When its president, Bill Gray, was a congressman, he was in Rangel's league in taking tobacco money.

Without people like Gray and Kweisi Mfume, head of the NAACP, Butts is concerned that African-Americans will ultimately lose the tobacco war. If the attorneys general, for example, negotiate a deal with the tobacco companies that give cigarette makers future immunity from lawsuits, African-American men, who smoke at higher rates than most segments of the population and who have fewer resources to hire antismoking lawyers, will be disproportionately locked out of redress for their illnesses.

"I'm tired of being the bad guy," Butts said. "Bill Gray is a great guy, and he does great and important work in our communities. And I have to stand up and tell him he's a hypocrite? Instead of direct confrontation, I'm hoping for some gentle persuasion with the facts about what is happening in our community. They know what the right thing is, but they're unable to turn down the money. It's too hard. But the day has to come when we decide that the lives of people are more important than the money."

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