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Gas additive proposal shelved

How Bush reversed regulatory efforts

By Pete Yost
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration quietly shelved a proposal to ban a gasoline additive that contaminates drinking water in many communities, helping an industry that has donated more than \$1 million to Republicans.

The Environmental Protection Agency's decision had its origin in the early days of President Bush's tenure when his administration decided not to move ahead with a Clinton-era regulatory effort to ban the clean-air additive MTBE.

The proposed regulation said the environmental harm of the additive leaching into ground water overshadowed its beneficial effects to the air.

The Bush administration decided to leave the issue to Congress, where it has bogged down over a proposal to shield the industry from some lawsuits. That initiative is being led by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

The Associated Press obtained a draft of the proposed regulation that former President Clinton's EPA sent to the White House on its last full day in office in January 2001.

It said: "The use of MTBE as an additive in gasoline presents an unreasonable risk to the environment."

The EPA document went on to say that "low levels of MTBE

can render drinking water supplies unpotable due to its offensive taste and odor," and the additive should be phased out over four years.

"Unlike other components of gasoline, MTBE dissolves and spreads readily in the ground water ... resists biodegradation and is more difficult and costly to remove."

People say MTBE-contaminated water tastes like turpentine.

In Santa Monica, Calif., the oil industry will pay hundreds of millions of dollars because the additive contaminated the city's water supply.

"We're the poster child for MTBE, and it could take decades to clean this up," said Joseph Lawrence, the assistant city attorney.

In 2000, the MTBE industry's lobbying group told the Clinton administration that limiting MTBE's use by regulation "would inflict grave economic harm on member companies."

Three MTBE producers account for half the additive's daily output.

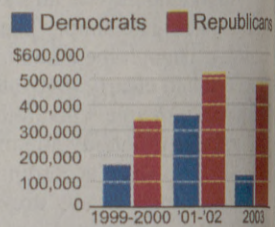
The three contributed \$338,000 to George W. Bush's presidential campaign, the Republican Party and Republican congressional candidates in 1999 and 2000, twice what they gave Democrats, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Since then, the three producers have given just over \$1 million to Republicans.

The producers are Texas-based Lyondell Chemical and

MTBE industry donates to parties

Three companies responsible for half of all MTBE fuel additive contamination have contributed nearly \$2.0 million to both parties since 1999.

Combined campaign contributions, by party



SOURCES: Center for Responsive Politics; Federal Election Commission

Valero Energy and the Huntsman companies of Salt Lake City.

"This is a classic case of a Bush administration helping a campaign contributor friends at the expense of public health," said Frank O'Donnell, executive director of the Clean Air Trust, a Washington-based environmental group.

Huntsman spokesman Don Olsen, echoing comments by other MTBE producers, said "We were not a huge campaign contributor and this has absolutely nothing to do with campaign donations. It has to do with good public policy."

The industry says it has become a victim in a Washington power struggle.



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Coke probe still on after 7 months

By Harry R. Weber
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — A government investigation into business practices at The Coca-Cola Co. continues seven months later, but several former federal prosecutors following the case say they wouldn't be surprised if no criminal charges are filed.

"From the things that I've seen, they've done an internal investigation that refuted many of the allegations. If that holds out and proves to be the case, I would expect the government to reach a similar conclusion," said Richard Deane, a former U.S. attorney in Atlanta.

Coke announced July 11 that federal prosecutors had launched a criminal investigation into fraud allegations raised in a lawsuit filed by a whistleblower against the world's largest beverage company. The Securities and Exchange Commission also is conducting a formal probe.

In his lawsuit, former Coke manager Matthew


Whitley claimed Atlanta-based Coke rigged a marketing test. Coke has since admitted that some of its employees undermined the marketing test at Burger King restaurants in Virginia in 2000.

Coke's auditing committee, however, said it found no evidence of more serious allegations in the lawsuit, including Whitley's claim that Coke improperly shifted \$4 million of capital funding to a fountain project.

"Some people on the street might think that where there's smoke there must be fire, but that may not necessarily be true," said Buddy Parker, another former federal prosecutor in the Atlanta office. "The government might ultimately decide there is no fire and there is no basis to bring forth charges."

Spokesmen for the U.S. Attorney's office and Coke have declined to comment on any aspect of the investigation, which could take months longer to conclude. The investigation was not mentioned by Coke officials when they released fourth-quarter and year-end earnings last week.

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*Helpful hints on resume writing, dressing for success, and marketing yourself
*General ideas for putting your best self forward

"Resume Day"
Wednesday, February 18, 2004 Blocker lobby & Harrington south outside entrance, 10 AM - 2 PM
*Have your resume critiqued for presentation to prospective employers
*Helpful hints on how you can best present your skills and experiences

"Liberal Arts Career Fair"
Friday, February 20, 2004 Rudder Exhibit Hall 10 AM - 3 PM
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