

TARGETING ILLICIT VAPES

Burr faces challenges lobbying Trump’s FDA to rein in Chinese vapes



U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., speaks during a discussion with U.S. Sen. Mark Warner at Wake Forest University on Monday, Nov. 11, 2019 in Winston-Salem.

RICHARD CRAVER
Winston-Salem Journal

Retired U.S. Sen. Richard Burr has hit the ground sprinting with his career as a lobbyist since a two-year congressional waiting/“cooling off” period expired in March.

According to OpenSecrets.org, Burr’s 14 clients so far with global law firm DLA Piper include the Atlantic Coast Conference, Duke University, Duke University Health System, Novartis AG, UNC Chapel Hill and his alma mater Wake Forest University.

The lobbying efforts for the universities are focused on federal research funding and the endowment tax.

Burr’s highest-profile effort so far involves serving as chairman of Coalition for Smarter Regulation of Nicotine, an 11-member group led by Altria Group Inc., Reynolds American Inc., Japan Tobacco International Liggett and the National Association of Convenience Stores.

OpenSecrets reports Burr has received at least \$125,000 for his work with the coalition. By comparison, Burr’s salary was \$174,000 in 2022 — the last of his 18 years as North Carolina’s senior U.S. senator.

Burr is guiding the coalition’s efforts to convince, if not prod, the Food and Drug Administration into increasing efforts to remove unregulated Chinese vaping products from U.S. retail shelves, as well as accelerating the review and approval process for U.S. manufacturers’ vaping products.

The goal is for the Chinese vaping products to adhere to the same authorization pathway as U.S.-made vaping products. Manufacturers are required to prove that their products provide a reduced consumption risk compared with traditional cigarettes.

How successful Burr’s efforts with the Trump administration’s FDA may come to down how persuasive is Burr’s messaging — which echoes anti-smoking advocates — compared with the potential to being ignored or turned away due to his February 2021 impeachment vote to convict President Donald Trump.

Burr plays to Trump’s antagonistic approach to trade with China in his July 29 letter to FDA commissioner Dr. Martin Makary.

“I write to commend and support your commitment to address the illicit market of nicotine products — an urgent threat to U.S. sovereignty, public health and law enforcement capacity,” Burr writes.

“The U.S. is in the midst of a crisis created by the free flow of illegal nicotine products into the U.S. marketplace, the majority of which are supplied by Chinese companies that are knowingly breaking U.S. laws.”

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Endowment tax set to hit private universities

CHEYANNE MUMPHREY
Associated Press

A big increase in the tax on university endowments adds to financial uncertainty for the wealthiest colleges in the U.S., leading several already to lay off staff or implement hiring freezes.

Spending more endowment money on taxes also could lead colleges to reduce financial aid, cutting off access to elite institutions for lower-income students, colleges and industry experts warned.

President Donald Trump signed the tax increase, part of his signature spending bill, into law last month.

The new tax rates take effect in 2026, but colleges such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford already cite the tax as one of many reasons for making cuts across their

universities. Each will be on the hook to pay hundreds of millions more in taxes, while also navigating the Trump administration’s other threats to their funding.

A tax on college endowments was introduced during Trump’s first administration, collecting 1.4% of wealthy universities’ investment earnings. The law signed by Trump last month creates a new tiered system that taxes the richest schools at the highest rates.

The new tax will charge an 8% rate at schools with \$2 million or more in assets for each enrolled student. Schools with \$750,000 to \$2 million will be charged 4%, and schools with \$500,000 to \$750,000 will continue to be charged the 1.4% rate.



TED SHAFFREY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Princeton University campus in New Jersey is seen from the air on Oct. 8, 2024.

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