# Pay-to-Play: IWF Defends e-Cigs without Disclosing Funding from e-Cig Industry

independentwomensforum.org/news/pay-to-play-iwf-defends-juul-without-disclosing-juul-funding

May 23, 2019



The Independent Women's Forum has published more than a dozen posts advocating for deregulation of e-cigarettes and promoting the benefits of vaping since 2018. Those pieces downplay the adverse health effects of nicotine, an addictive substance derived from tobacco plants which has been linked to heart disease. But there is much more to this story.

#### By Evan Vorpahl and Lisa Graves

Some of IWF's claims backing e-cigs and attacking their regulation have appeared in *USA Today, the Hill*, and *The Washington Examiner*. Its representatives have also made such claims in media appearances on local radio stations and on the National Rifle Association's video arm, NRATV.

But in all of these outlets IWF has failed to disclose that it has been funded by tobacco and vaping companies determined to re-normalize the use of tobacco.

IWF/V does not disclose its corporate funders in articles. After its recent Koch funding was revealed by others, it put the 2018 gala program on its website, with no disclosure of its history of corporate and trade group funding.

However, we have documentation of tobacco funding since at least 2017. When it first began accepting tobacco money is not known.

Those documents show that Philip Morris International was an underwriter in 2017. PMI's most famous products are cancer-causing Marlboro cigarettes. According to *Reuters*, Philip Morris "has spent more than \$3 billion developing new smoking platforms like iQOS," an electric cigarette that heats tobacco into a vapor rather than burning it.

The gala documents also show that Juul Labs and Altria were underwriters of IWF in 2018. Although Juul markets its device as a "smoking cessation" company, one of the nation's largest tobacco companies, Altria, purchased a 35% stake in Juul in December, making its founders billionaires

#### overnight.

The total amount of funding IWF has received from these three companies is unknown, but what is known is that IWF routinely defends Juul and e-cigs. None of its articles since 2018 disclose that it receives any money from this industry.

This is classic pay-to-play front group activity. It presents the arguments favorable to industry without revealing to readers its financial ties to the corporations that would profit from the anti-regulation position pushed by IWF.

### Juul Dominates the Market and that Market Is Filled with Teens

Juul is the largest e-cig company in America, accounting for nearly 75 percent of the market. While Juul describes itself as a company aimed at helping smokers quit, its product is a sleek, USB-like device and they sell fruity flavors such as fruit punch, mango, and crème brule, flavors that appeal to teens.

Alongside Juul's meteoric rise in 2018, which saw the company go from 200 employees to over 1,500, vaping by teens has skyrocketed. Vaping among high school students has been dubbed an epidemic by both the <u>FDA</u> and <u>Surgeon General</u>.

In 2018 alone, tobacco use among high school students rose 38 percent and 21 percent of all high schoolers vaped, up 78 percent from the year before. The CDC <u>has attributed this spike</u> in teenage vaping to the rise in popularity of Juul.

As more young people try Juul, the frequency with which teens are vaping addictive nicotine has shot up: 28 percent of high school students who are vaping reported doing so 20 or more times a month.

The American Heart Association has warned of negative consequences to heart health and reported that long-term use is likely to lead to <u>significant blood vessel damage</u>. When Juul hit the market, its nicotine pods contained much more nicotine than competitors, causing an <u>industry "rush"</u> to match Juul's high nicotine levels. Juul pods also contain mostly <u>protonated nicotine</u>, which is much less harsh than nicotine in free-base form, allowing users to inhale much more nicotine at a time than they would be able to otherwise.

The CDC, the FDA, and the Surgeon General of the United States have all expressed concern that Juul is a leading cause in reversing a 20-year trend of decreased teen tobacco use.

Although Juul postures as anti-teen vaping, a study concluded that Juul's early ad campaigns were <u>"patently youth oriented"</u> and that the company had borrowed from the PR playbook of Big Tobacco.

# IWF Shills e-Cigs Without Disclosing Funding from the e-Cig Industry

IWF downplays concerns, calling them public "alarmism" over vaping. It has even asserted that over-regulation of e-cigarettes is the *real* health crisis.

Julie Gunlock is the main IWF talker who defends e-cigs. IWF posts and media do not disclose IWF's funding from e-cig companies.

Her title is director of IWF's "Center for Progress and Innovation." In this role, Gunlock has written extensively echoing the corporate line in pushback to commonsense regulation of chemicals in products women, men, and children put on their skin, toxic pesticides sprayed on food, and e-cigs.

In February 2019 Gunlock penned a piece in *USA Today* titled <u>"E-cigarettes are much safer than smoking but few know it. That's a public health tragedy."</u> Meanwhile, data from the CDC indicates that vaping products are likely drawing kids to cigarettes, not away from them.

Neither Gunlock nor IWF disclosed its funding from Juul to *USA Today* readers. Subsequently, after apparent complaints, the paper appended the fact of the funding to the op-ed.

IWF has received funding from the Tobacco Industry since at least 2017, but it has not disclosed that to readers.

In 2018, as study after study demonstrated the real extent of teenage e-cigarette use, Gunlock hit the airwaves and refused to concede that teenage vaping was a problem and rather advocated for teaching kids about vaping from a "harm reduction" standpoint. Neither she nor IWF disclosed the funding from Philip Morris.

Earlier this year, while fighting off regulatory efforts to curb teen abuse of e-cigs, Gunlock wrote that "teen vaping should also be kept in perspective, rather than positioned as a dire public health emergency" and claimed public health officials were misleading the public by calling the surge an epidemic. She did not disclose IWF's funding from Altria.

Gunlock has also echoed Juul's exact talking points, such as the line that its products have "helped millions switch from cigarettes." What Gunlock does not mention is the number of teens who have become addicted to nicotine because of Juul, and the consequences that may have on their long-term health.

As Juul was beginning to dominate the e-cig market last year, Gunlock was echoing the company's lines when she <u>characterized the company as small and unaffiliated with Big Tobacco</u>, "A lot of people just assume these big, huge tobacco companies are just coming up with these vaping products, it's not true... Juul is a little company. It's a small company." Just one month earlier, a Juul executive <u>told</u> <u>the New York Times</u>, "We're not a big tobacco company. We're an independent company."

### IWF Attacked FDA Regulation of e-Cigs, Too

As the FDA sought to combat the rapid rise in teenage vaping, IWF has worked to thwart any regulation through lobbying and public advocacy. What IWF did not mention to the FDA or public was its funding from PMI.

In response to the FDA announcement to regulate fruity flavors, widely popular among teens, Gunlock issued a statement critical of the move and wrote that teen vaping may be a positive outcome if kids choose e-cigs over cigarettes.

#### **IWF Asserts that Regulating e-Cigs Will Hurt Women**

In 2017, Gunlock also submitted a comment to the FDA on behalf of IWF in favor of Philip Morris' IQOS e-cigarette and against new proposed regulations.

IWF argued that the FDA would be "punishing women, simply for their gender" if it did not approve Philip Morris' e-cig device. That Big Tobacco company funded IWF that year.

She claimed that vaping regulations are discriminatory against women, citing a study that claimed women experience more intense cravings for the physical activity of smoking than men, which neither the patch or gum address.

IWF has also compared regulations on e-cigarettes to sex education. Its staff director, Carrie Lukas, wrote: "Abstinence only' is the wrong approach to vaping products" in <u>The Hill</u> in 2018. Again, IWF's funding from the e-cig industry was not disclosed to readers of that op-ed.

Notwithstanding IWF's PR operations in defense of e-cigs, "Juul finds itself facing public and regulatory scrutiny from critics who say the company fueled a teen vaping 'epidemic.' A number of lawsuits accuse Juul of intentionally hooking teens on nicotine, the <u>Food and Drug Administration</u> is investigating the company's marketing practices and on (May 15), the <u>North Carolina attorney general sued Juul,</u>" according to CNBC.

The image accompanying this story, licensed from Getty, features e-cigarettes from a different brand than Juul, one of the corporate funders of IWF/V that has been uncovered.



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### Julie Gunlock

Director, Center for Progress and Innovation



Julie Gunlock is director of Independent Women's Forum's center for progress and innovation. She is the author of the book From Cupcakes to Chemicals: How the Culture of Alarmism Makes Us Afraid of Everything and How to Fight Back.

Before joining IWF, Gunlock served as a Professional Staff Member on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and on the House Homeland Security Committee, and on the staffs of Ohio Senators Mike DeWine, George Voinovich, and Tom Coburn. Gunlock has written about food and culture for the New York Post, the Washington Post, New York Daily News, the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, Forbes, U.S. News & World Report, The Washington Times, National Review Magazine, National Interest Magazine, the Tampa Tribune, and Townhall.com and is a regular contributor to National Review Online, BlogHer and Huffington Post. She has offered political commentary on Fox News, TheBlaze TV and other networks and is a regular guest on local, regional and national radio programs.

She lives in Virginia with her husband and three young, active, and perpetually hungry boys.



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#### #151 New Vaping Report Proves There is Profit in Creating Fear Around E-Cigarettes

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Independent Women's Forum is an educational 501(c)(3) dedicated to developing and advancing policies that aren't just well intended, but actually enhance people's freedom, choices, and opportunities. IWF is the sister organization of the Independent Women's Voice.



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#### **About IWF**

Independent Women's Forum is an educational 501(c)(3) dedicated to developing and advancing policies that aren't just well-intended, but actually enhance people's freedom, choices, and opportunities. We work every day to engage and inform women and create a community to discuss how policy issues – including paid leave, health care, taxes, energy, minimum wage, and education – impact them and their families.

### The Women Of Independent Women's Forum



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#### **SENIOR FELLOWS:**

IWF wants women to be able to express their own opinions freely and encourages a robust debate on the issues facing our country. Our senior fellows are passionate about the cause of improving society and helping people live better lives. We promote our senior fellows because we believe these women are doing excellent work and deserve a platform to be heard. Although affiliated with IW, the views and opinions expressed by each fellow are her own and may not reflect the official position of the organization. If you are interested in a fellowship at IWF, please click this link to our application.



<u>Christina Villegas</u> Senior Fellow

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