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# Congress poised to pass bill to escalate tobacco regulation

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Congress is poised to pass legislation that will give the Food and Drug Administration unprecedented powers to regulate tobacco products, forcing tobacco companies to disclose their ingredients and end “light” cigarette ads.

Despite opposition from lawmakers representing tobacco states, the Senate on Wednesday was on its way to passing the bill, which would empower the FDA with regulatory authority over how cigarettes and tobacco products are made, including the ability to control nicotine levels and other ingredients.

It would also allow the agency to control cigarette advertising and would ban it in magazines and newspapers.

“If we are seriously considering the reform of our health care system, then we should not wait to deal with this issue,” Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said in a Senate floor speech, noting the public and private financial burden associated with health problems caused by smoking.

“We have an opportunity to begin charting a new course today. With this bill we will help chip away at the health costs, steer our children away from smoking and pave the way toward a healthier future for our nation.”

The tobacco industry has resisted government regulation and is currently entangled in the courts over its use of “mild,” “light” and “ultra-light” in its cigarette advertising, a battle that would end if this bill becomes law.

The Senate voted 84-11 on Tuesday to bring the bill to the Senate floor for a vote, all but guaranteeing its final passage late this week or sometime next week.

The House passed a similar bill by a wide margin in April, and President Barack Obama is expected to sign



Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said that the public and private financial burden associated with health problems caused by smoking demand a legislative solution. (Getty Images)

the legislation into law once it reaches his desk.

While fewer than a dozen senators opposed the bill this week, they made their case that the bill could hurt tobacco-producing states.


Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., said he would offer an alternative to the bill that bans magazine and newspaper advertising but is otherwise less restrictive.

Patrick Basham, a scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said the bill sidesteps the real causes of smoking “and concentrates almost exclusively on restricting tobacco marketing, while leaving the other risk factors for adolescent smoking unaddressed.”

“There is nothing in the proposed legislation that shows the FDA understands the well-documented connections between education, poverty and smoking status, connections that provide the key to helping adults stop smoking,” he added.

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