

Bill proposes to raise tobacco tax to a dollar

BY JESSICA FARGEN
Senior staff writer

Legislature

Taxing Nebraskans an extra 66 cents per pack of cigarettes was the goal of a bill introduced Friday geared at curbing teen smoking.

LB505, introduced by Lincoln Sen. David Landis, would bring the state tax on cigarettes and smokeless and chewing tobacco to \$1 and generate an estimated \$75 million for health care funds and initiatives.

But those against the hike said increasing the tobacco tax could create a black market for cigarettes, send Nebraskans across state borders to buy cheaper cigarettes and hit poor and middle-class smokers harder.

Landis said the purpose of LB505, co-sponsored by Sidney Sen. Gerald Matzke, is not to collect tax dollars for the state, but to save the lives of about 10,000 Nebraska teenagers.

"It's not about raising money,"

Landis said. "It's about reducing teen smoking."

About 39,000 Nebraska teens smoke, but when the price of cigarettes is raised 10 percent, 15 percent fewer teen-agers buy cigarettes, he said. The proposed hike is a 20-percent increase, which he said would reduce smoking by 30 percent — about 10,000 teenagers.

"It's demonstrable — if you don't smoke cigarettes you live longer," Landis said. "I will vote on probably 400 bills. Which one besides this will save lives?"

The tax could generate up to \$75 million the first year, but that was not the goal of the bill, said Rich Lombardi, a lobbyist for Citizens for a Healthy Nebraska.

"It's 10,000 lives, that's the thing," Lombardi said. "That's not just an academic undertaking; this is a proven fact. This is the most effective way to save people's lives."

Groups that already receive money from the current 34-cent tax would be unaffected by the tax change. The money generated from the tax would benefit the state's environmental trust fund, cancer research and a state health care fund.

Landis said other anti-smoking attempts such as increasing fines if a teen-ager is caught buying or smoking tobacco and public service announcements are not doing the trick.

But Bill Peters, a lobbyist for the Brown and Williamson tobacco company, was skeptical of the real benefits of laws that make it more expensive to smoke and chew.

Peters said studies showing decreased tobacco use proportional to increased price looked good on paper, but the high price of illegal drugs has not curbed teen use.

"Whether or not it influences cigarette use among teen-agers, I would say it's problematical," Peters said. "If price is a factor, then hard drugs certainly haven't shown us that that discourages."

Peters said raising the price of tobacco may cause fewer people to smoke, but he doubted the hard statistics given by Lombardi's health group.

Studies could be flawed, Peters said. Questions arise such as how a smoker is defined and how many illegal sales slip through the cracks.

Peters also said regressive taxes, such as a cigarette tax, hit the poor and middle class harder than the rich. "People that buy and use ciga-

"I will vote on probably 400 bills. Which one besides this will save lives?"

SEN. DAVID LANDIS

rettes are generally lower-income, and within the lower income is a significant population of minorities," Peters said.

"So this will definitely impact them."

Another impact of a heftier cigarette tax, he said, would be "border bleed" — groups of Nebraskans running for neighboring states to buy tobacco.

And when Nebraskans buy tobacco across the border, Peters said, the state's economy loses sales tax revenue and money spent out of state on other goods while buying cigarettes.

Larry Allen, operations manager for Mills Food Shops, which operates several Lincoln convenience stores, was also not pleased about the possibility of another cigarette tax increase.

"What kind of a program do you think they're going to get for 66 cents to get teens to quit?" he asked. "I think it's a ploy by the government to increase their income."

Allen said teen-agers should be held more accountable for their illegal actions instead of stores being continually fined for selling to those teens.

"Why aren't they getting the teens for possession?" Allen asked.

Allen agreed that making Nebraskans pay more for tobacco products will just drive them to neighboring states. And it will increase the incentive for illegal activity, he said.

"It will make it more lucrative for somebody to steal them and sell them then it does now."

In addition to Landis' bill, President Clinton has given smokers more to worry about.

Clinton announced a plan last week that would add another 55 cents onto the federal cigarette tax to pay for social initiatives such as after-school programs and hiring new police officers, as well as military spending.



"Use your noon hour to RELAX"
For more information, call Sue at 472-7450
Counseling & Psychological Services

• January 19 Breath of Life/Passive Progressive Relaxation

Tuesdays
12:10 - 12:45
UHC-Room 43

• January 26 Breath Meditation & Body Scan

JOIN THE BALLROOM DANCE CRAZE !!

Come Learn...

- Tango
- Foxtrot
- Jitterbug
- Salsa
- Cha Cha
- Swing



College Dance Club

"Everyone welcome!"
Singles & Couples

Monday & Tuesday

8:15-10 pm

Wednesday 9:15-10:15pm

Mable Lee Hall 304

Questions? Contact Shelley
Brackhan Dance Directive
435-3344

and many more!



PACKAGE INCLUDES:

- Round-Trip Airfare
- 7 Nights Hotel Accommodations
- Free Welcome, Beach & Evening Parties
- Free Admission to Night Clubs
- Packages available to Norfolk and Montego Bay
- Round-Trip Airport & Hotel Transfers
- Discounts on Restaurants, Water Sports & Excursions
- Professional On-Site Tour Buses
- Complete Weekly Activities Program Offering Optional Sunset Cruise, Beach Cruise, Teen Party & More!
- Free Beach Party Pack

ONE LOVE. ONE HEART. ONE GREAT PARTY!!!

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR WHEN THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS COME TO JAMAICA TO FEEL ALL RIGHT - FOR AN UNBELIEVABLE PRICE!!!



Sun Splash Tours 1 800-426-7710
Student Travel Services 1 800-648-4849

JAMAICA

Price is per person based on quad occupancy; from select departure cities. Other cities may qualify for reduction or require surcharge. US and Jamaica departure taxes (currently \$59) and \$9 handling charge additional. Rates increase \$30 on 12/15/98. Peak-week surcharges/off-week discounts may apply. Restrictions and cancellation penalties apply. Limited availability. Subject to change without notice. Call for full details on hotel selection and availability.

Advertising 101: Subliminal Messages

Notice the Double Slice Pizza below?
If so, you've got an
overly active imagination.

In other words, you're destined for
a great advertising career.
While you're still a student, come try our.
Pizza or Pasta for under \$4.
Class dismissed.



4603 Vine Street, 466-4045, Lincoln

dailyneb.com



Responsible Choices

- SEXUALITY EDUCATION RESOURCES & SERVICES
- LOW-COST PREGNANCY TESTING & ALL-OPTIONS INFORMATION
- BIRTH CONTROL SERVICES
- ABORTION SERVICES
- STD TESTING AND TREATMENT FOR MALES & FEMALES
- FLU SHOTS AND SPORTS/EMPLOYMENT PHYSICALS

Service in a Comfortable, Professional,
Non-Discriminatory Environment.

EDUCATION & ADMINISTRATION CLINICS
2246 S. 24th St. 3795 S. 10th St. 2246 W. 5th St.
441-3332 441-3333 441-3300