

NEW PLANS FOR TOBACCO SETTLEMENT

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Yesterday's Senate Republicans' plan for Utah's tobacco settlement money is not today's plan. And it might not be tomorrow's after the House GOP has its say.

Senate President Lane Beattie, R- West Bountiful, unveiled a new proposal Friday for the approximately \$27 million the state expects this year from the successful lawsuit against the tobacco industry. It comes a day after Democratic Attorney General Jan Graham took Republican lawmakers to task for dragging their feet. She plans to continue a TV ad campaign that began Thursday urging residents to demand more money be spent on tobacco prevention programs.

An agitated Beattie said he takes offense at Graham's approach but "the Legislature has delivered."

According to the latest iteration of SB15, half of the money would be spent on health-related programs, while the other half would be placed in a trust account.

The first \$5.5 million would fund the Children's Health Insurance Program, supplanting a hospital bed tax that subsequently would be repealed. Tobacco prevention and cessation programs and Utah's successful drug court would get \$3 million each. The University of Utah Health Sciences Center would receive \$4 million for cancer treatment and research.

"I feel this is the strongest program we can put forward," Beattie said.

Republican House leaders apparently don't think so.

"We don't agree with that," House Speaker Marty Stephens, R-Farr West, while glancing at a copy of the Senate proposal. Stephens said the House did like the previous plan.

The change between two plans is slight but apparently significant. Beattie shifted \$1 million from tobacco prevention to drug court.

Legislative Democrats intend to hold a news conference Monday to blast Republicans for "irresponsible and poor lack of planning," according to a news release. Most of the money should be spent now on youth tobacco and drug prevention programs not locked up in a trust fund, they said.

Meantime, the Senate plowed ahead Friday with a resolution to set up a constitutional trust fund where half of the anticipated tobacco money would be invested, with the principal amount never to be touched.

Well, almost never.

The Senate amended SJR14 to allow future Legislatures to tap the fund, provided three-fourths of both the House and Senate and the governor agree to do so. Under the original language, the new trust fund could be raided only if a majority of voters approve.

"There may be an emergency of such dire consequences that we would want to take that money out, all or part of it," Sen. Lyle Hillyard, R-Logan, argued on the Senate floor.

But Sen. Steve Poulton, R-Holladay, sponsor of both the SJR14 and HB15, said the amendment doesn't make much sense.

"It doesn't do anything but pilfer money from a fund we really ought to preserve in perpetuity," he said.