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U.S. House Backs Federal Regulation of Tobacco

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News Summary

The U.S. House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly to allow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate tobacco, but the legislation faces an uncertain path in the Senate and opposition from the Bush administration, the [New York Times](#) reported July 31.

The legislation, derived partly from negotiations with tobacco giant Philip Morris USA, would not allow federal regulators to ban tobacco products or eliminate nicotine altogether from the products. But it would permit the FDA to call for reductions of nicotine to non-addictive levels based on public health goals. The bill also would force tobacco companies to disclose significant details about the additives they include in cigarettes and smokeless tobacco, and would place new restrictions on tobacco advertising.

The bill passed on a 326-to-102 vote in the House, but the White House has indicated it does not support the move to regulate tobacco as a drug. It remains uncertain whether the Senate, which could consider the legislation in the fall, would be able to achieve a veto-proof majority in support of the measure.

New fees imposed on tobacco companies would largely finance the FDA's tobacco regulatory activity. Tobacco companies would have to restrict outdoor advertising and print ads seen by children to black-and-white formats in order to minimize their visual appeal, and warning labels on tobacco products would replace some of the text seen today with graphic images depicting tobacco's physical effects.

House debate on the measure featured an exchange between Minority Leader John A. Boehner (R.-Ohio) and bill sponsor Henry A. Waxman (D.-Calif.). After Boehner asked, "How much is enough? How much government do we need?", Waxman replied, "Well, cigarettes, one of the most dangerous products on sale today, are not regulated at all."

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