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**The Lewiston Tribune**  
Lewiston, Idaho  
**Wednesday Dec. 6, 2017**  
**by William L. Spence**  
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## Idaho's tobacco-use age could rise

*Millennium Fund Committee discusses ways to keep people from getting started*

An Ada County lawmaker says he plans to introduce legislation during the 2018 session that would raise the legal age for tobacco use in Idaho from 18 to 21.

Sen. Fred Martin, R-Boise, said the age restriction would apply to the purchase and use of all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

During a meeting of the Idaho Millennium Fund Committee in Boise Tuesday, Martin noted that about 85 percent of people who smoke say they took up the habit between the ages of 18 and 21.

"If we can curtail that through legislation, I think it would be worthwhile," he said.

Martin introduced a similar measure near the end of the 2017 session. The Senate State Affairs Committee killed the bill on a 5-4 vote, despite testimony describing it as "the single most effective policy the state can take to improve public health in Idaho."

Burley Rep. Fred Wood, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee and co-chairman of the Millennium Fund Committee, said raising the tax on tobacco products also would help.

"We (the state) are asked to spend an awful lot of money on both prevention and cessation," he said. "Historically and empirically, it's been proven the quickest way to stop people from smoking is to make tobacco and tobacco products more expensive. Doubling or tripling the taxes on tobacco would be the quickest thing to decrease the use of tobacco and to prevent people from getting started. We certainly need to recommend that to the Legislature."

Sen. Patti Anne Lodge, R-Huston, said if the Legislature does raise the cigarette tax, she hopes any additional revenue would be dedicated to public health issues, rather than go toward unrelated needs.

The Millennium Fund Committee makes recommendations on how the Legislature should allocate a small portion of the funding Idaho receives each year from a 1998 tobacco lawsuit settlement.

In previous years, the committee has supported using settlement dollars to pay for the Department of Health and Welfare's Project Filter tobacco cessation program, as well as tobacco prevention programs operated by the state's public health districts. It also has accepted grant applications from a variety of organizations for other tobacco and substance-abuse prevention programs.

Earlier this year, however, the committee agreed to hold off on accepting any grant applications for fiscal 2019. The committee members, who are all state lawmakers, have concerns regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the programs and wanted time to consider how the money can best be used in the future.

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Whether that temporary moratorium should be extended for another year, into fiscal 2020, was the subject of lengthy discussion Tuesday.

Sen. Janie Ward-Engelking, D-Boise, said the state needs to invest more money in smoking prevention programs and should address the growing use of e-cigarettes.

“If we aren’t investing in prevention, especially on this new issue of vaping, I think we’re missing the bus,” she said. “We’re going to see long-term expenses for (tobacco-related health issues) that are more expensive than if we put money into prevention.”

Martin wasn’t ready to lift the moratorium just yet, however. Given the current uncertainty regarding federal tax reform efforts, he wanted more time to see what effect that will have on state revenue collections before telling public health groups that they can begin submitting grant applications once again.

“I want to be able to give them a clear signal,” he said. “I don’t want to open the door and then have to close it again (if it turns out Millennium Fund money is needed to address other state funding shortfalls).”

The committee agreed to wait until its next meeting in February before deciding whether to extend the moratorium or once again accept grant applications for fiscal 2020.

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