

## **SENATE PARES DOWN TOBACCO MONEY BILLS**

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A Senate panel has whittled one bill from the growing number of proposals on how to spend money from the state's settlement of its lawsuit against big tobacco companies.

Sen. Robert Montgomery, R-North Ogden, had proposed spending \$15.4 million on tobacco prevention, offsetting for one year a tax on hospital beds that funds the Children's Health Insurance Program, and creating drug courts.

Under the drug court program, an offender would plead guilty to a drug-related offense and, instead of going to jail, would be ordered to undergo rehabilitation and be closely monitored.

Gov. Mike Leavitt has urged tobacco money be spent on the court program.

Montgomery said drug court pilot programs have cut re-offender rates from near 70 percent to just more than 10 percent.

A tobacco bill sponsored by Sen. Steve Poulton, R-Holladay, already has passed the committee. The Senate is waiting for other tobacco proposals to pass committees so they all can be debated at once.

Poulton, who chairs the rules committee which assigns the bills to other committees, said he has heard there may be as many as 17 proposals on how to spend the tobacco windfall.

Poulton's bill allocates \$5 million for research into tobacco-related illnesses, \$10 million for prevention programs and \$5.5 million to repeal the hospital bed tax. The remainder would go into the permanent school trust fund to help Utah schools.

Montgomery argued that his bill spent the money more responsibly because it only appropriated the \$15.4 million that the state already has. Poulton's bill spends money the state is expected to receive in April and would have committed funds to maintain the repeal of the hospital tax.

Poulton's bill has the backing of a broad coalition, including the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, the Utah Hospital Association and Utah Taxpayers Association.