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Cigarette machine legislation under fire

ST. PAUL (AP)—Legislation that would water down local ordinances banning cigarette vending machines in Minnesota drew fire Monday from community leaders who criticized the measure as an assault on local control.

"To pre-empt our actions will damage our image in the state as a caring community willing to go the extra mile to protect our youngsters from experimenting with an addictive substance," said Jerry Briggs, mayor of the St. Paul suburb of White Bear Lake.

The measure, authored by Rep. Bob McEachern, DFL-Maple Lake, and Sen. James Metzen, DFL-South St. Paul, would ensure uniformity across the state in regulation of the vending machines. It has the backing

of the Coalition for Responsible Vending, a group of five Minnesota trade associations involved in distributing tobacco products or in the entertainment or liquor business.

The measure would supersede local ordinances that have placed restrictions on such machines, and in many cases would weaken regulations already passed by communities across the state.

Under the legislation, vending machines could remain in locations where access to minors is restricted, such as factories and similar businesses. Elsewhere, the machines must be monitored and have locking devices that must be activated in order to make a purchase.

In October, White Bear Lake

became the first community in the nation to ban cigarette vending machines. Seven other communities, including Duluth, Bloomington and St. Cloud, have since followed suit, and another ten cities have passed partial bans on the machines.

Briggs and other local leaders said the pending legislation shows the tobacco lobby's fears of growing anti-smoking sentiment across the state. Since the movement to ban tobacco vending machines can't be stopped on a local level, they said, the lobby is targeting the Legislature to bring it to a halt.

"The ball is rolling," said Briggs. "To stop it now would, I feel, cause our state serious damage."