

Mass. cigarette tax jumps \$1 per pack

AP Associated Press**By Steve Leblanc, Associated Press Writer | July 1, 2008**

BOSTON --The tax on a pack of cigarettes in Massachusetts will jump by a dollar under a bill signed into law by Gov. Deval Patrick.

The tax, one of the highest in the nation, goes into effect immediately.

Patrick signed the bill Tuesday, a day after House and Senate lawmakers rushed to approve the bill by the start of the new fiscal year.

The increase brings Massachusetts' cigarette tax to \$2.51 per pack. New York has the highest cigarette tax in the nation at \$2.75 per pack.

Supporters say the tax increase would help raise \$174 million in revenues. They say the extra money will go to help cover the cost of the state's landmark health care law.

They also defended taking up the final version of the bill one day before the tax was intended to take effect.

Opponents say the measure unfairly targets one group of people and will hurt small Massachusetts businesses that sell cigarettes close to the New Hampshire border.

The House approved the measure by a 93-52 vote after a brief debate and sent the bill to the Senate, where it was also approved by a 26-9 vote Monday.

Neighboring states are also eyeing higher cigarette taxes, though not as dramatic an increase.

Vermont's cigarette tax rate climbs by 20 cents to \$1.99 per pack effective Tuesday, a jump that follows a 60-cents-per-pack increase in 2006.

New Hampshire's cigarette tax, now \$1.08 per pack, is slated to jump to \$1.33 in October if it doesn't generate at least \$48 million in revenues between July and October.

Some Massachusetts stores had begun collecting the tax earlier in the day on Monday anticipating that Patrick would sign the bill into law.

Anti-smoking advocates hailed the new tax.

"Increasing the tobacco tax is one of the most effective tobacco control strategies with the impact on our youth undeniable," said Marc Hymovitz, spokesman for the American Cancer Society. "The effect of this tax increase will be an estimated 25,000 smokers quitting and 46,000 youth never starting to smoke." ■