

Menthol hampers tobacco regulation

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Public health experts say exempting menthol from a ban on flavored cigarettes shows the power the tobacco industry has over the U.S. Congress. Lawmakers are considering a bill giving the U.S. Food and Drug Administration oversight of the tobacco industry. Some scientific data suggest flavored tobacco products make them more attractive to young consumers, and particularly to African-American smokers, who make up the overwhelming majority of menthol-cigarette smokers, The New York Times reported Tuesday. Menthol products make up \$17.5 billion of the \$70 billion U.S. cigarette market. Lobby support on Capitol Hill is crucial to the bill's passage and many say including menthol cigarettes in the bill would make it dead on arrival. "I would have been in favor of banning menthol," U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., told the Times. "But as a practical matter that simply wasn't doable." Tobacco giant Phillip Morris published a report in 2007 in a peer-reviewed journal that found scant evidence menthol is a more dangerous than other products but federal health officials say there still is "reason for concern," the Times said.

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