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# State Duma Passes Anti-Smoking Bill in 2nd Reading

By Alexander Winning

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Lawmakers on Friday overwhelmingly voted in favor of legislation toughening rules for smokers and tobacco sellers, signaling that the bill could be signed into law as soon as next month.

In total, 442 State Duma deputies voted for the "anti-tobacco bill," cheering as the result was announced. One deputy voted against, and one abstained.

The bill, heavily amended after passing a first reading on Dec. 14, has prompted a wave of criticism from smokers' rights groups and kiosk owners, who have described its provisions as "excessive" and "harsh."

On Tuesday, former world chess champion and United Russia lawmaker Anatoly Karpov was accused of lobbying the interests of international tobacco companies for proposing to exclude an article from the bill addressing the illegal tobacco trade.

The anti-smoking legislation envisages banning smokers from lighting up in educational institutions, government buildings, short-distance forms of public transportation and parks from June, when tobacco companies would also be banned from advertising and stores would have to keep tobacco products out of sight.

Starting from June next year, kiosks would be prevented from selling tobacco and smoking would be banned in bars, restaurants, nightclubs, medical and cultural institutions, long-distance forms of public transportation and hotels.

Further measures designed to crack down on the illegal importation and production of tobacco products are to enter force in January 2017, while plans to hike excise taxes on tobacco and set the minimum price for a pack of cigarettes at 61 rubles ($2) would be introduced once the government works out a feasible time frame.

President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev have both voiced their support for new anti-smoking legislation.

Sergei Kalashnikov, chairman of the Duma's Public Health Committee, said by phone that the bill was "an important step in safeguarding the health of Russian citizens."

Kalashnikov, who is a member of the Liberal Democratic Party's Duma faction, said the bill should be passed in a third and final reading before Feb. 16.

Ahead of Friday's second reading, significant amendments included imposing a ban on the production and sale of electronic cigarettes and allowing regional governments to pass additional legislation specifying places where smoking would be prohibited.

But the Duma's Public Health Committee excluded a prevision that would have banned smoking rooms in workplaces and rejected a proposal to outlaw smoking outright.

In one major concession, the committee waved a potential ban on shops covering an area of less than 50 square meters from selling tobacco due to complaints from small businesses.

Nikolai Gerasimenko, deputy chairman of the committee and a United Russia lawmaker, told the Duma that kiosks could continue to offer tobacco by altering the layout of their stores and stopping selling tobacco products through shop windows.

Vladlen Maximov, leader of the Coalition of Kiosk Owners, said this was a significant compromise but doubted whether kiosk owners in large cities would be able to easily reconfigure their stores.

"Then there's the bureaucracy you'd have to overcome and the extra money you'd have to find," Maximov said, adding that tobacco products can account for up to two-thirds of kiosks' sales.

"And authorities have no objective evidence that kiosks sell tobacco to underage smokers, as they claim. They have acted from the point of view that kiosks are fundamentally evil," he said.

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