

# NATION

## McCain rebuts fellow Republicans on tobacco-bill cost

By Mary Ann Akers  
and Samuel Goldreich  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Sen. John McCain, already at odds with GOP leaders over his anti-smoking bill, intensified his defense yesterday against accusations that the measure would be even more expensive for the tobacco industry than first estimated.

This sparring, combined with sniping between Republican critics of the tobacco measure and its Democratic supporters, provided a preview of the complexity of next week's debate on the anti-smoking legislation on the Senate floor.

"We didn't invent this bill," the Arizona Republican said. "It is an

adaptation of the June 20 settlement, which was applauded and agreed to by everyone."

The legislation would give the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco, raise the price of cigarettes by \$1.10 per pack and penalize tobacco companies if they fail to meet targets for cutting underage smoking.

Mr. McCain and the White House have estimated that the bill would cost the industry \$516 billion over 25 years. But a new analysis by Senate GOP leaders, issued over the weekend, concluded that it would cost the industry anywhere from \$755.3 billion to \$868.9 billion, based on an inflation rate of 2.7 percent per year.

Republican leaders said the re-

port shows the McCain bill amounts to a big-spending, bureaucratic nightmare that would raise taxes on American families and do little to stop smoking by children. The report is sure to play a critical role in next week's expected debate.

Mr. McCain said the report, written by the Senate Republican Policy Committee, an arm of the Senate GOP leadership, could not be taken seriously because the estimate was not based on any formula used by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, which scores all legislation.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle agreed. "People should understand this came from a partisan committee that is largely in

opposition to the bill itself," he said. "So I don't think anyone should be surprised by that analysis."

The South Dakota Democrat said Republican leaders "seem to be saying exactly what the tobacco companies would like them to say."

Sen. William V. Roth Jr., Delaware Republican and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, is planning to offer his own proposal during next week's floor debate, with input from a formidable group of senators on his committee that opposes the McCain bill.

The Roth legislation, which likely would cost the tobacco industry much less than the McCain bill, could include several revenue-raising alternatives to the

McCain bill, such as higher federal excise taxes on tobacco rather than the \$1.10-per-pack tax increase on cigarettes.

That measure is supported by several outspoken Republican critics of the McCain bill, including Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, Assistant Majority Leader Don Nickles of Oklahoma and Sen. Orrin G. Hatch of Utah.

Mr. Hatch, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is working on his own bill that would grant tobacco makers the limited immunity they seek from future health-related lawsuits.

On another front, Sen. John H. Chafee, Rhode Island Republican and chairman of the Senate Envi-

ronment and Public Works Committee, a supporter of the McCain bill, is expected to release a plan today to curb exposure to second-hand smoke.

The latest legislative maneuvering comes amid signs of weakening public support for Mr. McCain's bill, according to a poll, released yesterday.

It said 47 percent of respondents opposed and 45 percent supported a bill that would increase the price of cigarettes by \$1.10 per pack. The survey also said 73 percent of respondents did not believe the bill would actually reduce the levels of teen smoking, but it made no attempt to gauge opinion on what should be done to address the problem.