

# Gov. Mike DeWine talks flavored tobacco bans, transgender restrictions, Amtrak expansion

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Gov. Mike DeWine on Friday lamented the Ohio House’s override of his veto of a measure to prohibit local bans on flavored tobacco products, saying that allowing use of such products encourages “a whole new generation getting addicted to nicotine.”

DeWine, speaking to reporters at his annual holiday breakfast with Statehouse reporters, said he understood the argument by business interests that there shouldn’t be a patchwork of different tobacco rules among the 900-plus municipal governments across the state. But the governor, a longtime opponent of tobacco use, said lawmakers should address that concern by passing a statewide ban on flavored tobacco products.

“It’s pretty easy to have uniformity – just stop the flavors,” DeWine said. “Look, the flavors are what are getting kids addicted.”

The veto override still needs to pass the Ohio Senate with at least three-fifths support (or 20 votes in the 33-member Senate) in order to take effect. The Senate adjourned on Wednesday prior to the House’s override vote and isn’t scheduled to return until January.

If the veto override passes, it would void existing bans on flavored tobacco in at least three cities -- Toledo, Columbus and the Columbus suburb of Bexley.

DeWine also vetoed a similar standalone bill last January.

During a 50-minute Q&A session at the breakfast, DeWine was asked about a number of other high-profile bills and issues, including:

- House Bill 68, which would prohibit transgender athletes from participating in women’s high-school and college sports and ban minors from undergoing gender-affirming medical treatment. DeWine said he’s “taking a hard, hard look” at the GOP-authored bill, which passed the legislature earlier this week. The governor has 10 days to sign HB68, veto it, or let it become law without his signature once his office officially receives a copy of the legislation.

- Senate Bill 83, a Republican-authored bill that includes a sweeping package of higher education reforms designed to tamp down perceived liberal bias on college campuses. DeWine didn't say whether he would sign the bill if it reaches his desk. However, he said that on some college campuses outside of Ohio, there "needs to be respect for diversity of thought" and that there is "sometimes a tendency to have some speech that's more protected than other speech. And that's just a mistake."

- House Bill 201, which would ban state electric vehicle mandates and permit natural gas companies to charge Ohio customers up to an estimated \$67 million per year to build pipelines to potential megaproject sites. DeWine also didn't say whether he'd sign the Republican-backed bill, which passed the legislature earlier this week. However, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said that Ohio loses development business deals "when the utilities are not in place because we can't act fast enough to get in there." As for electric vehicles, DeWine suggested the best way to get more electric vehicles on the road is to build charging stations and other infrastructure for them.

- Amtrak expansion in Ohio. The effort to create or expand passenger rail service in the state got a boost earlier this month when federal officials approved money for additional studies. DeWine, as he's said previously, reiterated that for Amtrak expansion to work, the trains have to run fast enough that they will get people to other cities in about the same time it would take for them to drive. "It can't average 34 miles an hour," he said.