

# The Florida Times-Union

*Jacksonville, Thursday, April 30, 1998*

## Insurers sue tobacco companies

Knight-Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — A group of the largest health insurers sued the tobacco industry yesterday, seeking to recover billions of dollars they paid to treat smoking-related illnesses.

Blue Cross-Blue Shield plans from more than 35 states including Florida alleged that the tobacco industry violated a law

that has long been used against the Mafia. They also accused the industry of hiding information about nicotine's addictiveness and of marketing to kids.

The health plans may seek as much as \$10 billion in damages for every year that they had to bear the costs of smoking-related illnesses, which could be decades.

The lawsuits may make the

settlement offered by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., which includes a \$6.5 billion annual cap on damages, seem a bit more enticing to the tobacco industry.

Senate leaders announced yesterday that the bill would be introduced on the Senate floor during the week of May 18. Several senators warned that the Blue Cross-Blue Shield lawsuits were only the beginning if Congress does not act.