

MILITARY

If you're "old enough to serve" in the military should make you be "old enough to smoke"?

No. This argument is a favorite of the tobacco industry and it is unpersuasive.

There are already things 18 to 20 year olds cannot do. Most notably, they cannot buy alcohol. In many states, they cannot gamble. Even hotel and car rentals can be difficult for youth over the age of 18, but under the age of 21. These restrictions are about health, safety, and recognizing the most undeveloped part of their brain is the part that regulates impulse control.

Ability to enlist in the military should not be the trigger for when a highly-addictive, deadly product should be made readily available to our youth.

The U.S. military is voluntarily abiding by these laws where they exist — for example in Hawaii where there is a strong military presence. Military bases are located on Federal land and not required to abide by the State of Hawaii's Tobacco 21 law, but they do.

Protecting the health of young men and women who are just starting their Military careers is patriotic and advances freedom, liberty, and national security interests by ensuring soldiers are healthy. In contrast, a lifetime of addiction is the polar opposite of freedom. There is very little "choice" in addiction.

The truth is, the human brain is still in development at age 18. As a result, young adults are much more sensitive to nicotine and can feel dependent earlier than older adults. The younger youth are when they start using tobacco, the more likely they will be addicted and the more likely they will die.

The close association of smoking with the U.S. military started in World War I. In fact, tobacco companies perniciously targeted military personnel by distributing cigarettes to servicemen as part of their rations. This is not a bright spot in U.S. history. We should not glorify it or replicate mistakes of our past in this policy debate.

CRIMINALIZATION

The law does not prohibits minors possessing or using tobacco products. How does that make any sense?

The tobacco industry's argument that we ought to be penalizing kids for possession is socially unjust.

There is no evidence that penalizing youth for use or possession of tobacco works. Moreover, we should be cautious about rushing to criminalize kids. Any time we introduce kids to the criminal justice system, it has the potential to change the trajectory of their lives. If the tobacco industry was serious about reducing youth smoking, they would stop spending billions of dollars, every single year, perniciously targeting a new generation of smokers.

It is socially unjust to punish and stigmatize our youth as a result of the tobacco industry's aggressive marketing to kids. A better solution — the evidence-based solution — is to enact meaningful youth access law that focus on rigorous enforcement of restrictions against sales to youth. That is exactly what this proposed ordinance does.

This law is misguided because evidence proves that most retailers obey the law. Kids are getting their tobacco from social sources, not retailers.

Actually, that is exactly why we know this policy will work. The Tobacco 21 law works because it substantially reduces the number of legal buyers in adolescents' social circles — in fact, is virtually eliminates tobacco from high school campuses.

And, because most retailers comply with the law, we know this policy will not place an undue enforcement burden on the City.

So, I would say this is one point we can all agree on. Frankly, it seems the opposition is making our case for us.

FARMERS

Won't this law hurt our tobacco farmers?

We are not aware of any tobacco growing in Michigan. There may be some specialty tobacco producers, but obviously on a very, very small scale.

- USDA crop estimates do not include Michigan in their tobacco production reports.
- The latest US Agriculture Census (2012) reports that none of the 52,194 farms in Michigan grow tobacco.
- Based on those facts, if tobacco is in being grown in Michigan, it's considered a specialty crop. The few individuals farming it are likely doing so on a very small scale, and therefore is a tiny fraction of their income.
- There have been news reports of Michigan farmers experimenting with a certain type of tobacco used only in making cigars, mainly for export.
- Even if Michigan were a more tobacco dependent state, and if the tobacco was used for products sold in the US, any declines in consumption would not directly affect the state's tobacco farmers. Decreased use of tobacco products in the US has little impact on US tobacco farmers who are growing for the world market (which includes roughly one billion smokers). If all smokers in Michigan (or any other state) quit smoking, it would have no measurable impact on any tobacco growers anywhere — in the US or overseas. Conversely, if everyone in Michigan started smoking, it would not benefit tobacco farmers in Michigan or elsewhere.
- Tobacco 21 laws have a very minimal impact on sales of cigarettes and other tobacco products in the short-term. Most of the public health benefit is due to the numbers of young people who will never start. There may be a miniscule impact on the FUTURE market for US tobacco farmers, assuming a majority of states adopt these policies and prevent a significant portion of young people from starting to smoke. Any impact on the handful of farmers who may be growing tobacco in Michigan is virtually non-existent.

RETAILERS ARE NOT THE PROBLEM

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