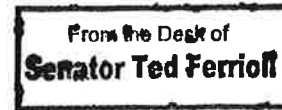


Raising The Smoking Age To 21 Is A Terrible Idea

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California has raised the smoking age from 18 to 21, and jurisdictions around the country are following suit.

New York City and Chicago have already passed similar legislation, placing America's three largest cities at the heart of a growing nationwide push for "Tobacco 21."

This is a terrible idea. It treats 18 to 21 year olds — who are encouraged to work, vote, and fight for their country — as people incapable of making basic life choices. And it won't even reduce youth smoking rates.

The legislation's motive is can be found in a 2014 Surgeon General's Report about the negative effects of tobacco on "young people" below the age of 21.

The report warns of the pressure teens face to smoke. "The tobacco epidemic", the report states, "was initiated and has been sustained by the aggressive strategies of the tobacco industry, which has deliberately misled the public on the risks of smoking cigarettes."

Some people may be influenced to smoke. But the negative health impacts of smoking are now so widely known — they are displayed on every pack of cigarettes — that it's ridiculous to assume the health consequences haven't been considered.

Some people, young and old, evidently weigh the risks and choose to smoke despite the potential health effects. For those who are addicted, there are ways to get help.

Unable to understand this choice, the surgeon general's report, and the advocates of "Tobacco 21," have resorted to assuming that "young people" must be incapable of resisting the "indoctrination" of the tobacco companies. They are therefore calling for legislation.

But this attitude is completely inconsistent with how 18 year olds are treated, both legally and culturally.

Eighteen year olds help decide who governs the country; they pay taxes; they routinely take on potentially crippling levels of student debt; fight our nation's wars; and if they commit a crime they are tried and sentenced as adults.

Surely they can be trusted to choose whether or not to smoke.

For all this coddling of young adults, raising the smoking age won't do anything to reduce smoking rates among actual adolescents.

Strict policies regulating the sale of tobacco already exist, and yet children under 18 still manage to get their hands on it.

In 2014, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 1.7 million Americans age 12 to 17 had used tobacco in the past month. It's already illegal for these people to buy tobacco, so simply raising the age requirement to 21 will not help.