

Poll: Utahns Support Raising the Legal Age to Buy Tobacco

A bill in the 2016 Legislature that would have raised the legal tobacco smoking age from 19 to 21 was killed in a House committee.

But a UtahPolicy poll by Dan Jones & Associates finds that three-fourths of Utahns support such a change.

[HB157](#) by Rep. Kraig Powell, R-Heber, was voted down the last day of February in the House Revenue and Taxation Committee in a [4-8-1](#) vote.

It was killed by Powell's fellow Republicans not because it would have cost the state around \$2 million a year in lost tobacco tax collections, but mainly because his fellow conservatives didn't like telling a legal adult that they couldn't choose to smoke.

Powell argued that Utah law already stops those 18-21 from legally buying and drinking alcohol products, from beer to wine to mixed drinks.

And research shows that many young people start smoking in their teenage years – get addicted and fight the bad health effects for years to come.

But Powell couldn't convince eight of his fellow House Republicans on the committee – which voted the bill down and sent it back to the House Rules Committee where it officially died at adjournment.

You can listen to the committee debate [here](#).

Powell didn't have to convince Utahns in general, however.

Jones in his latest UtahPolicy survey finds that 74 percent of adults favor raising the legal smoking age to 21 years old, 23 percent opposed the move, and 3 percent didn't know.

Of course, smoking is looked upon disparaging by a majority of Utahns who belong to the Mormon Church, which teaches its faithful to abstain from tobacco and alcohol.

Powell didn't make his arguments on religious beliefs, however, but on health concerns for younger adults.

And Jones finds that Powell's bill was supported by various groups across the demographic board:

- Republicans favor raising the smoking age, 81-17 percent.
- Democrats like the idea, 70-29 percent.
- Political independents support it, 67-29 percent.
- Those who said they are "very active" in the LDS Church like the change, 82-15 percent.
- All other religious groups also favor raising the smoking age, but to a lesser degree than faithful Mormons.



-- Even those who said they have no religion at all favor it, 62-36 percent.

Eighteen-year-olds can't smoke now, although they are considered adults in most other ways.

Jones found that those 18-24 years old favor raising the smoking age to 21, 68 percent to 33 percent.

Powell – who also lost a bill that would have done away with the so-called “Zion Curtain” in restaurants that serve alcohol – said that where possible the state should help younger adults make healthy life choices, which in the long run would save the state much more than the \$2 million lost in tobacco taxes each year.

Jones polled 625 adults from Feb. 10-15; the poll having a margin of error of plus or minus 3.92 percent.