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Poll: Big majority for banning nicotine products for those under 21

Posted on February 12, 2015 | By Joel Connelly

An “epidemic” in the use of nicotine vapor products prompted Gov. Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson on Thursday to call for a ban on purchase of nicotine products by all under the age of 21.



“The benefits of keeping nicotine out of the hands of teens are obvious.” — Attorney General Bob Ferguson

A statewide poll by EMC Research has found that two-thirds of Washingtonians agree with them.

“The benefits of keeping nicotine out of the hands of teens are obvious: 95 percent of adult smokers start before age 21 and lifelong health complications and cost to both the individual and taxpayer are enormous,” said Ferguson.

The AG cited a recent New England Journal of Medicine article, which said that smoking contributes to more diseases and causes 60,000 more deaths a year than previously believed. Smoking kills an estimated 500,000 Americans each year.

Inslee said the Washington Poison Center received 182 calls last year related to the vaping fluid in electronic cigarettes. Inslee wants to tax e-cigarettes and hike taxes on tobacco products.

Support for a 21-year-old requirement for the purchase of nicotine products runs across the geographic and political spectrums of the state, according to the EMC poll. The poll is based on 400 interviews.

It found that 64 percent of those surveyed back a 21-year age requirement, while only 35 percent of likely voters oppose

raising the minimum wage. A total of 41 percent of those surveyed strongly back a higher age limit. Only 19 percent were strongly opposed.

Seventy-five percent of Democrats back a higher age for purchase, along with 61 percent of independents. Support is softer among Republicans, but GOP voters still favor a 21-year age requirement by a 52-46 percent margin.

Sixty-one percent of men back a 21-year-old requirement, with higher support at 67 among women.

One voice of reservation was expressed on Thursday.

State Sen. Bruce Dammeier, R-Puyallup, wants to require child-resistant packaging on e-cigarettes. But he is skeptical about other proposals, notably Inslee’s proposal to tax e-cigarettes.

“Our top priority ought to be protection, not taxation,” said Dammeier. “These teen usage statistics are a matter of concern. Taxation is something we ought to consider separately, as a matter of fiscal policy. Our most important goal ought to be making sure our children are safe.”

Ferguson said the best solution will come “by moving tobacco and nicotine out of the pipeline that hooks new users in their teens, when their brains are unusually susceptible to nicotine addiction.”

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