

Letter: State needs to raise age to buy cigarettes

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We all love the promise of possibilities: Would it be possible for our state to save lives and to save money?

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., killing 450,000 individuals per year. That exceeds all fatalities in World War II.

These smoking deaths are not dramatic like an airplane accident with great attention, but slow and insidious, under the radar of public outcry.

And 9 million individuals live with a serious heart or lung illness due to smoking, shortening their lifespan by 10 years.

How about the economy: Smoking costs in the U.S. exceed \$133 billion in healthcare and an equal amount in lost productivity last year. These are real numbers in death, disability and dollars!

So what can be done?

The addictive and carcinogenic factors in cigarette smoke are known, even printed on the pack. Ninety-eight percent of all addicted smokers state that they begin smoking as teenagers.

Currently, 18 percent of all high schoolers smoke regularly (smokeless tobacco/ecigarettes not included; that is another dire statistic yet to be concluded). Today, 3,000 children will try their first cigarette, possibly beginning a lifetime of addiction.

The Journal of Neurology indicates that the immature brain is more susceptible to the addictive effect of cigarette smoke.

A child's weakness to addiction is our responsibility as parents and grandparents.

The legal age for cigarette purchase is established by the state and a few states are set at 21. An increase in the legal age will diminish the availability of tobacco products for children; limiting availability will limit addiction.

Encouraging our elected officials to increase the age for tobacco purchase to 21 seems simple, but the benefits are immeasurable to our economic and personal health.

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