

Opinion: We should raise the legal age for cigarettes to 21 - Isureveille.com: The Daily Reveille

Kain Hingle

As the worldwide leading cause of preventable deaths, cigarettes should have less of a hold on our society.

This week, Democrats in the U.S. Senate made the bold proposal to raise the national smoking age to 21. Raising the purchase age of cigarettes would ensure maturity in choosing to purchase cigarettes.

At 18, most people aren't mature enough to understand the weight of this decision. Even though we are legally classified as adults at 18, we usually don't act like adults and make harmful decisions in favor of a good time.

Cigarettes differ from the typical college decisions in their long-term effects. As a teen, your brain is still developing, which increases your vulnerability to nicotine and susception to addiction.

The brain is not the only developing organ negatively impacted by cigarettes. The lungs develop until age 20, and cigarettes stunt their growth.

This inhibition is permanent. A smoker's lungs may never reach full capacity, causing smokers to run the risk of chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Think of all the dumb decisions you made at 18 because of naivety. Procrastinating on a school project, skipping class and sneaking out were just a few. Luckily for us, these decisions are petty and likely won't matter in the long run.

Cigarettes are different. Smoking at an early age drastically increases one's chances of addiction. This decision affects the rest of our lives.

Teens are not given complete power over their body because we never know what they will do with it. If we continue to allow 18-year-olds to smoke, we continue to allow lives to be signed away because of ignorance.

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Cigarettes are deceptive — it's a slippery slope between the occasional craving and full-blown addiction.

A report conducted by the Institute of Medicine found raising the purchase age of cigarettes could prevent 223,000 premature deaths. The IOM also projects a 12 percent decrease in the prevalence in tobacco use by the time today's teenagers become adults.

Raising the purchase age would also decrease trickle-down effects. Because seniors in high school can purchase tobacco, they can buy it for their younger friends. This taints the sanctity of the purchase age. Increasing the purchase age will make it harder to bypass the laws for younger kids.

Cigarettes harm more than just the individual smoking. Almost 41,000 die annually from diseases caused by second-hand smoke, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

LSU is a tobacco-free campus to promote safety — not to inhibit the rights of the common man.

This newfound tobacco legislation will positively affect more than just 18 to 20-year-olds. If this proposal becomes law, straw purchases will become scarcer, and second-hand smoke will become less prominent.

Raising the purchase age of a harmful substance is not limiting an individual's rights on his or her body. Limiting the purchase range of harmful substances is designed to protect those who don't know they need protection.

Most people don't understand the causality of cigarettes at such a young age. Cigarettes are smoked because of the desire to be cool. Understanding comes with age, and people will eventually realize they don't need cigarettes. Unfortunately, this epiphany doesn't come usually until after 18 for many.

Cigarettes should be sold only when an individual is completely aware of the decision they are making. Eighteen is too young an age to make this decision. Giving people more time to make the decision between smoking and not smoking will hopefully help them make the right decision.

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