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## Letter: Raising tobacco purchase age would help military

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As retired, senior military leaders, we were concerned to read in a May 7 article ("Bill to raise cigarette age unlikely to pass this session") that opponents to a measure that would raise the legal age for tobacco purchase cited military service as an argument against the bill, and suggested an "active duty exemption."

In fact, because we're deeply concerned about the military readiness of our nation, we strongly support Senate Bill 3011, which would increase the legal age to purchase tobacco products and e-cigarettes to 21.

Tobacco use is higher in the military than in the civilian population. According to a 2011 survey published by the Department of Defense, close to half of all military service members (49.2 percent) used a tobacco product in the past 12 months. Tobacco use among active duty military personnel has enormous physical and fiscal impacts on force readiness; it reduces soldiers' fitness and endurance, and is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and lost productivity.

Tobacco use is banned during basic training because service members who use it are more likely to drop out. Additionally, the DoD says that those who use tobacco are more likely to sustain injuries, suffer increased surgical complications, and experience delayed wound healing.

In all, tobacco use costs the DoD an estimated \$1.6 billion annually in medical costs and lost productivity. An estimated 175,000 current active duty service members will die from using tobacco products unless they quit.

Increasing the age to legally purchase tobacco products is one of the most promising strategies we have to reduce tobacco use in youth and young adults. Americans owe much to the outstanding young people who choose to serve in our military. But early addiction to a deadly drug is no reward.

Major General (Ret) William Enyart, U.S. Army

Belleville

Brigadier General (Ret) Avrum "Mark" Rabin, U.S. Air Force

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