

The Rt Hon Jonathan Reynolds
Secretary of State for Business and Trade
House of Commons
London
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I write on behalf of the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) to encourage you not to proceed with the proposal to ban the sale of tobacco and/or nicotine-containing products to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009, as per the proposal in the Tobacco and Vapes Bill that is currently under review in the House of Lords — the “Generation Ban.”

PPI was established in 1989 as a center for pragmatic policy solutions and we have a long history of working globally to share best practices with policymakers. We are proud of the work we did in the 1990s on the “Third Way” with President Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair — the tradition of Democrats and Labour sharing ideas continues today with the work of our two UK-based experts from Labour.

One of the key healthcare policy ideas we have embraced at PPI is the goal of ending the use of traditional combustible cigarettes. With the right policy, this is something we can achieve in the next 10 years.

While we fully support efforts to reduce the harm caused by tobacco use, the most harmful way to consume nicotine is by smoking. Policies should continue to reduce the demand for smoked tobacco products by discouraging smoking and encouraging smoking cessation. We also know that allowing less harmful alternatives to smoking to remain available can play a major role in reducing smoking prevalence and eventually eliminating smoking. The UK Department of Health has been a leader in the strategy of Tobacco Harm Reduction, and we recommend that this leadership continue.

We also know that constricting supply by prohibiting products — for entire countries or sub-segments of the population — doesn’t work so long as demand persists. The U.S. prohibition on alcohol in the 1920s and ’30s didn’t reduce drinking, it merely shifted supplies from legal, regulated markets to illicit ones. More recently, the Kingdom of Bhutan found that prohibiting the sale of tobacco products did nothing to reduce smoking prevalence but merely shifted demand to illicit traders. We believe a similar outcome is likely with the proposed Generation Ban on tobacco products, particularly if the products remain legal for one subsection of the population but not another.

In addition, we are concerned that the Generation Ban may be considered by some as a barrier to trade and have adverse effects on UK trade policies. We have seen references to extreme regulation proposals of other products, such as alcoholic beverages, that are already being used in this manner in recent days, bringing into question the role of such regulatory proposals in the current international trade context. The proposed Generation Ban could also face similar international

scrutiny and pressure, and we are concerned that this would further jeopardize the public health objective of reducing smoking rates announced by your government.

With the current occupant of the White House, we know how fragile the relationship is between the United States and the UK. The President campaigned with slogans like “I will end the war on vapes!” He and his team have made the new nicotine delivery methods a part of trade talks along with technology, alcohol, and other consumer products they have chosen to defend. For progressives like me, I worry about unnecessary laws impacting the greater good. The generational ban fits into that category.

To hasten the obsolescence of cigarettes, we recommend that the UK continue its current course, including tax and regulatory measures to reduce (or eliminate) demand for cigarettes as well as its policy of Tobacco Harm Reduction, which has collectively led to record-low smoking rates (<https://www.medscape.co.uk/viewarticle/uk-smoking-rate-hits-historic-low-2023a1000kr4>).

In 2015, Dr. David Halpern, CBE (head of the now-independent “Behavioural Insights Team”) reflected on the UK’s positive experience with the regulation of e-cigarettes and projected that consumer-acceptable, safer alternatives to cigarettes could make smoking obsolete:

“E-cigs offer, perhaps for the first time ever, the prospect of eliminating (or even banning) smoking altogether. With a plausible, seemingly safer substitute in place, the public health community might want to ponder whether e-cigs, however ambivalent they feel about them, might enable societies to get rid of smoking for good. Given that smoking is the leading cause of preventable deaths in the USA and many other countries in the world today, this would be a remarkable achievement.”¹

That same rationale would apply even more now when smoking rates are at historic lows and a wide range of less harmful, non-combusted alternatives to cigarettes are now available in the UK.



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Cc: The Lord Kamall
The Lord Sharpe of Epsom OBE
The Baroness Merron
The Rt Hon Wes Streeting

¹ David Halpern, Inside the Nudge Unit: How Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference, (2015), p. 196.