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## My Turn: E-cig restrictions unreasonable, premature

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Now over a month into the legislative session, some lawmakers in Juneau are considering enacting a statewide ban on the use of e-cigarettes in public places, including indoors. If lawmakers proceed with Senate Bill 209 and House Bill 360, they will erroneously expand an existing smoking ban to products that do not emit smoke. In doing so, they may unnecessarily impose burdensome restrictions on adult consumers and get in the way of these products playing a role in reducing tobacco-related harm in a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulated environment.

Lawmakers should take some time to consider the important, distinctions between e-cigarettes and cigarettes. While they may share a similar name and shape, e-cigarettes have unique characteristics and construction that should not be ignored. E-cigarettes contain a battery-powered heating device that vaporizes a nicotine or nicotine-free fluid. The vapor they produce is then inhaled. An e-cigarette does not require a flame, nor does it combust like regular cigarettes. As a result, it does not produce smoke. I feel I must reiterate that point: e-cigarettes do not produce smoke, they produce vapor. Even the act of using an e-cigarette is called "vaping," not "smoking."

Scientists and federal regulators are examining the applications of e-cigarettes in a national tobacco harm reduction strategy. The FDA is on the case. They have significant expertise and they have signaled their plans to carefully study the science on e-cigarettes to issue appropriate regulations that will be grounded in scientific research. Until federal officials present their scientific findings, Alaska lawmakers should refrain from imposing broad restrictions on e-cigarette use.

We need to learn more about how adult consumers intend to use e-cigarettes, otherwise legislators may act imprudently. Premature state action on e-cigarettes could cause of a myriad of unintended consequences. Not only would unwise e-cigarette restrictions unnecessarily burden adult consumers, they could stifle the migration to these vapor-emitting devices by deterring adult tobacco consumers from using new and potentially less risky tobacco products. By inhibiting adult consumer adoption of e-cigarettes, state lawmakers may interfere with the worthwhile efforts to create a national tobacco harm reduction policy. What's more, lawmakers should consider the maze of contradictory rules they may create if they impose use restrictions that differ from potential federal rules on the issue. Ultimately, Alaskan consumers and small businesses will have to navigate those possibly conflicting rules.

Furthermore, I believe this is an issue that can be best addressed outside the corridors of the Legislature. Business owners — such as retailers, restaurateurs or hotel operators — are best aware of how to accommodate the needs of their patrons. These hardworking Alaskans should have the opportunity and flexibility to determine the e-cigarette use policies that are best for them instead of mandates from Juneau.

Like many, I believe e-cigarettes should only be sold to and used by adults. I also support restrictions on the use of e-cigarettes in schools and other places meant for children. However, Senate Bill 209 and House Bill 360 go far beyond that. Lawmakers should follow science and evidence, and clearly that is still being developed. As lawmakers continue their work on these two bills in the coming weeks, I hope they will take these points into consideration and reject the unreasonable use restrictions on e-cigarette products that do not even emit smoke.

• Robert Rodman is a Juneau resident and owner of Percy's Liquor.

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