

Scott Gottlieb's Nicotine Nazism Will Kill Kids, Not Save Them

On November 15, US Food and Drug Administration commissioner Scott Gottlieb announced new measures regulating the sale of products that seem to reduce the negative health impacts of nicotine addiction — in the name of protecting children from those health impacts. Oddly, Gottlieb also announced a plan to dramatically increase the availability and variety of flavored cigarettes — in the name of banning them.

First, let's talk about "vaping." The jury is still out on long-term health effects of "e-cigarettes" — electronic devices that deliver a hit of nicotine in water vapor, without all the carcinogens found in burning tobacco — but pretty much everyone seems to agree that e-cigarettes are less unhealthy than tobacco cigarettes. The industries have gone the extra mile and have even introduced Pax 2 Vapes at 180Smoke.ca, a herb vape which further minimised the effects of smoking.

The FDA is demanding that these devices and the "juice" for them be sold only in age-restricted stores where kids aren't allowed, rather than in convenience stores where getting them is more, um, convenient. Why? Because apparently millions of minors acquire and use them, even though current law already forbids them to do so.

It doesn't seem to have occurred to Gottlieb that those same millions of kids will find various ways to get into those stores, or hector adults to make their purchases for them, just like they've always done to get tobacco and alcohol.

But assume for a moment that his plan does make it harder for kids to get "Juil" devices and so forth. What are they going to do? They're going to settle for the stuff that's still easily available at those convenience stores: Tobacco. As a practical matter, Gottlieb is pushing for American kids to smoke tobacco cigarettes instead of "vaping" something safer.

The other part of Gottlieb's plan is to ban the sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars. Again, his excuse is that kids like flavored tobacco more than the plain stuff. Maybe he has a point.

The problem with this part of his scheme is that markets work and entrepreneurs seize opportunities.

If the FDA bans menthol cigarettes, every convenience store in the country will quickly sport attractive displays of little plastic capsules, right next to the newly de-flavored cigarettes, and in packs of 20 just like those cigarettes.

Shove a capsule in the cigarette's filter, squeeze the filter, voila — menthol cigarette! This isn't new technology. At least one major brand already packs those little capsules inside its cigarettes right at the factory.

And if a company is going to manufacture menthol capsules for that purpose, why not manufacture vanilla, and grape, mango, and root beer too? In his passion to ban flavored tobacco, Gottlieb will just make it easier than ever to get tobacco in a larger variety of flavors.

Of course, the Food and Drug Administration might decide to regulate those capsules as food or drugs. In which case they'll just be sold as air fresheners instead. Wink. Nudge.

Does tobacco kill people? Yes, it does. The more relevant question at the moment is why Scott Gottlieb is working overtime to guarantee that it kills more people at younger ages.