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Raising the Legal Age to Purchase Tobacco is an Important Added Tool in the Fight, But is Insufficient to End the Youth E-cigarette Epidemic

Statement from Robin Koval, CEO & President, Truth Initiative®

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 20, 2019) –The passage of federal legislation to raise the minimum age to legally purchase tobacco to 21 is a step in the right direction to reduce youth tobacco initiation. However, this move alone, cannot be viewed as sufficient to solve the youth e-cigarette epidemic. The administration still needs to immediately clear the market of all flavored e-cigarettes, including mint and menthol, and apply this policy to all brick-and-mortar and online retailers, including vape shops.

While it is important to reduce youth access to all tobacco products in retail environments, flavored products are the primary driver of the youth e-cigarette epidemic with 97% of young people who vape using flavors. The most obvious and effective way to address this urgent problem is for the administration to follow through on its promise and for FDA to use its regulatory authority to remove flavors from the market.

We should not be misled by tobacco industry support for this measure or their talking points suggesting that now that it's done, we can move on from the conversation. In fact, it is a clear sign that raising the legal age of sale to 21 will have only limited impact in reversing this national chemistry experiment on our youth.

The enactment of this measure into law should instead spur the federal government to use all the tools in its considerable regulatory arsenal – such as removing flavors – and at the same time should also inspire state policymakers to do everything they can via banning flavored products, tax increases, strong clean indoor air laws and fully-funded state and local tobacco control efforts so that 2020 is the year we see youth nicotine addiction headed in the direction it belongs ... down!

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