

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Editorial: Utah should tax e-cigarettes

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The idea that a device designed to introduce the world's most fatal addictive substance into the bloodstreams of its users is somehow a benefit to society — so much so that those who profit from the manufacture and sale of said device should be exempt from taxes — is absurd beyond belief.

Yet that's the argument that is being raised against the [proposal from Gov. Gary Herbert](#) that the nicotine delivery devices known as e-cigarettes should be taxed.

The governor's proposed budget lacks detail, but it estimates that some kind of e-cigarette tax could raise \$10 million a year. The idea is to extend to e-cigarettes the theory that cigarettes should be hit with high taxes as a way of discouraging their use and offsetting their public cost.

These are gizmos that heat tobacco-extracted nicotine enough to vaporize it, allowing the user to inhale some of the same chemicals emitted by the old-fashioned process of setting a small collection of tobacco leaves on fire. The sticks that vaporize the chemicals, and the "juice" used to refill them, are now exempt from Utah's cigarette tax, currently 87.5 percent of their wholesale price.

Those in the business would, of course, like to keep it that way. Their primary argument — other than the obvious tack of calling it a tax hike and, therefore, evil — is to claim that e-cigarettes are a tool to help people wean themselves off of regular (analog?) cigarettes.

That means that they are potentially healthy for the user and beneficial to the rest of society. Beneficial enough, the argument goes, to be tax free.

No doubt there are many people who have successfully used e-cigarettes for that purpose. But the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention isn't buying it.

"The plural of anecdote," [says Dr. Tom Frieden](#), "is not data."

Frieden has some much harder numbers that undermine the e-cigarette industry's claims. [A CDC survey](#) shows that, in 2013, some 260,000 middle and high school students had used an e-cigarette even though they had never smoked.

Thus the CDC's case that, even if e-cigs provide some with a path away from smoking, they lure others — younger and much more vulnerable — into the nicotine habit.

As Herbert rightly points out, e-cigarettes often offer young people a modern-sounding, sometimes candy-flavored, introduction into the world of nicotine addiction.

The state may not be able to stop that. But it should not subsidize it, either.

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