

Good morning!

My name is Karl Champine. I was born and raised in Rutland, Vermont. After high school I pursued a career in construction and have worked in that field for 38 years. I knew that I would have to have a back up plan because my body would not make it to the retirement age of 65. In 2011 I opened Token Glass, a smoke shop located in Castleton, Vermont. I worked 2 jobs and 7 days a week in order to be able to retire from construction and have a career waiting for me that I could grow old with. I have taken a lot of interest in my community by supporting local artisans, sports teams and participating in various fundraisers for community members.

Things were going along great! After 8 years of renting the business property I was able to purchase it in early January of 2019. I was happy for about a week. Then came the vape tax and plans to raise the smoking age to 21. I knew these policies would have a negative impact on my business. I let my full time employee that was making 17 dollars an hour go. The 92% tax has been devastating as well as raising the smoking age to 21. The tax raises the price by at least double on products that have nothing to do with nicotine. The state reps claimed we have to make the prices so high that kids can't afford them. It did just that. Adults can't afford them either. You can buy a full size bottle of strawberry shortcake Vodka at the Vermont liquor store for 10 dollars less than any vape liquid I carry. I might add, the liquor is in the main aisle of the drugstore for all to see and reach, not in an age restricted store such as mine or behind locked cases. We as a state have managed to push adults back to smoking cigarettes instead of using a 95% safer alternative way to consume nicotine.

Adults like flavors. When you are trying to break the habit of smoking the last thing you want is something that reminds you of smoking. Many say that without flavors they will just go back to combustible tobacco. There is no interest in menthol or tobacco flavored liquid. Too much like smoking.

Juul became a problem when Altria bought a stake in it and every gas station in the country started to carry it. I'm not sure if all of you know who Altria is. They, along with Reynolds tobacco have spent over 90,000 dollars since September to lobby Vermont legislators to leave menthol on the shelves in stores. Small businesses like mine can't afford to hire lobbyists. They like the idea of banning flavors so they can eliminate all the competition that small vapor companies and vape shops bring to the marketplace. Bottom line is it cuts into their profits. Without flavors, big tobacco can reign supreme again and go back to monopolizing the market as they have for 100 years. If we are really concerned about peoples health and youth consumption we would ban cigarettes altogether. Cigarettes have killed more people than all of the wars in history combined. Big tobacco are the merchants of death and they pay to play.

Never let a good crisis go to waste. The problem with the recent crisis is that not one death or illness was related to nicotine. All were black market THC cartridges according to the recent data published by the CDC. This last crisis is a good example of why flavors need to be kept legal. There are already kids that are making their own e liquid and selling them on the black market. They buy the ingredients from amazon or the local grocery store, mix it in the basement and bingo they have liquid. This is a fact. Untaxed, unregulated, e liquid. If you wonder how minors obtain such things I would gander the same way that we did when we were kids. From our parents, out friends and our siblings.

This year I would project that the state of Vermont would collect a tidy sum of tax money from me. Via the vape tax, sales tax, income tax, property tax on top of the money that I spend in my local economy. I feel unwelcome in my home state and that my business is no longer welcome here. Perhaps you don't need my tax dollars. Banning flavored vapes is a good way to accomplish this. On a personal note, if I lose my house, my business, my car, my health insurance, my good credit score... what is the state of Vermont going to do to help me survive? I know of at least 3 businesses that have closed their doors because of the vape tax.

It is odd that we are entering a time of legalization of cannabis a product that has been prohibited for over 50 years and we are talking about banning flavored vapor. As we know prohibition creates a black market. 78% of teenagers that tried vapes said they did so out of curiosity. Less than 14% of teenagers have tried a vape or vaped within the past 30 days according to the new New York University study. To sum it up 86% of them don't vape at all. For the state of Vermont to once again punish adults for trying to make better choices is just a tragedy. Adults need and deserve the freedom to make choices that are best for them. Get vapes out of the gas stations and sell them in adult only stores. That along with the misguided tax and the age requirements would protect public health and combat youth vaping. Let me be clear, in a perfect world no one would vape, smoke, drink or use drugs especially youth. But we are where we are. Keep it legal and keep it safe. We deserve that.

Karl Champine

Token Glass

802-779-6055