

You Can't Make This Stuff Up

Written by Smoke Signals
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Happy New Year! And welcome to 2011.

It was 91 years ago - in 1920 - that Prohibition became law in the United States. The "Noble Experiment" in legislating morality failed, of course, and the eighteenth amendment to the constitution was repealed in 1933.

Almost a century later, a group of legislators and bureaucrats continues to follow the same fruitless path, trying to outlaw smoking. However they're not the moral equals of the misguided prohibitionists, who at least had the courage of their convictions.

But today's "prohibitionists" are cowards. They know that any attempt to actually ban smoking would likely go down to defeat. So for decades, the politicians who do the bidding of the anti-smoking movement just eat around the edges in their attempts to legislate morality. Continual harrassment of smokers, trying to get them to quit, is one of the major weapons in their arsenal.

And now, they have another proposal: try to make smokers vomit - or at least feel really, really guilty - whenever they look at a pack of cigarettes.

Needless to say, we're exaggerating. But we're sure you've seen (or can picture) the graphic photos that they want to require on every pack's warning label: rotted lungs, oxygen masks, gravestones, crying babies.

(A few other nations, like New Zealand and Brazil, already require very graphic warning labels on their cigarette packs. We have been unable to find any claims, let alone proof, that those labels have had any effect on smoking rates in those countries. What we DID find that was somewhat amusing, was a British story from 2003 about a huge increase in sales of cigarette cases - coinciding with a law requiring annoying large warning labels in Britain.)

We have no doubt that American smokers will shortly be seeing some graphic warning labels every time they light up. But we also have no doubt that the labels will have very little, if any, effect on smoking rates in the US.

Warning labels may have made a difference in the American smoking rate - in 1966, when they first appeared. Smokers now KNOW the dangers of smoking- and have for decades. Many feel guilty that they smoke - many others don't feel guilty at all - probably the majority of smokers are somewhere in the middle. But anyone who still smokes in the year 2011 isn't going to make a decision to quit based on public service announcements - articles about the dangers of something they're calling "third hand smoke" - or nasty pictures on their cigarette pack.

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What's laughable about the whole situation is that today's "prohibitionists," who keep poking their heads out from behind their barricades to fire another legislative or regulatory shot at smokers before ducking back down, have already accidentally SUCCEEDED.

Two of those shots - drastically restricting the area where people are allowed to smoke, and increasing cigarette taxes to unbelievably high levels - have succeeded in drastically reducing the percentage of people who smoke, and drastically cutting the amount that individual smokers consume. It's impossible to know whether those numbers can be cut much further without an outright ban - but we seriously doubt it.

Effectively, the anti-smokers have won.

But cowardly, rabid anti-smokers aren't trying to just cut the smoking rate. They're trying to ELIMINATE smoking, without banning it.

And a lot of bureaucrats' jobs (for example, many at the Food and Drug Administration, which is proposing the new warning labels) depend on the anti-smoking movement. There's no way they can declare victory and walk away; they have to keep "campaigning" against smoking, in order to justify their continued employment.

So welcome to 2011. The US smoking rate has been cut from 45% in 1954 to 21% today; and the ratio of former smokers to current smokers among those 65 and older is greater than 5-to-1. An unbelievable number of people have chosen not to start - or have quit.

Anyone who stops to think about it, would most likely conclude that the war against smoking has been won - and that those who still smoke, aren't doing it because they haven't been scared enough.

But new warning labels are on their way.

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