

Bill to phase out smoking advances in UK parliament

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Sunak's proposal would make it an offense for anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 to be sold tobacco products.

A contentious bill that aims to eventually phase out smoking in Britain advanced in parliament on Tuesday, as the House of Commons voted in

favor of the controversial measure.

The bill would ban the selling of tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009—effectively raising the smoking age by a year each year until it applies to the whole population.

The UK parliament kicked off debate on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's planned flagship legislation on Tuesday, despite opposition from many in his own Conservative Party.

"This has the potential to phase out smoking in young people almost completely as early as 2040," the government said when it unveiled the plan, calling the move "historic".

In the first vote of the bill, 383 MPs voted in favor with 67 voting against.

The bill will need to be adopted by the House of Lords to become law.

Among those who opposed the bill were nearly 60 Conservative MPs—including business secretary Kemi Badenoch and other senior secretaries of state.

Conservative MPs were given a free vote, meaning they were able to defy the government without fear of being suspended from the party.

Smoking is the UK's biggest preventable killer and opinion polls show that around two-thirds of people in the UK back a phased smoking ban.

However, libertarian-leaning MPs on the right of the ruling Conservatives, including former prime minister Liz Truss, have branded the move an attack on personal freedoms.

Conservative MP Simon Clarke told BBC radio that he was "both skeptical and downright opposed" to the plans.

"I think that an outright ban risks being counterproductive, I think it actually risks making smoking cooler, it certainly risks creating a black market, and it also risks creating an unmanageable challenge for the authorities," he said.

Former prime minister Boris Johnson also said at an event in Canada last week it was "mad" that the party of Winston Churchill was "banning cigars".

Vaping clamp down

Opening the debate for the government, Health Secretary Victoria Atkins told the House of Commons that there is "no liberty in addiction".

"Nicotine robs people of their freedom to choose. The vast majority of smokers start when they are young, and three quarters say that if they could turn back the clock they would not have started," she said.

The proposed ban was supposedly inspired by a similar plan in New Zealand which was later dropped.

Official figures show smoking causes about one in four deaths from cancer and leads to 64,000 deaths in England per year.

"If parliament passes this new bill, it will put the UK at the very forefront of the fight to eradicate one of the most harmful inventions of modern times," said Lion Shahab, co-director of the tobacco and alcohol research group at University College London.

The legislation also seeks to clamp down on young people vaping by restricting flavors and packaging to make them less appealing to children.

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