

No more excuses to keep breathing secondhand smoke in public

The excuses ring hollow; the arguments fall flat.

Secondhand smoke is dangerous.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's report on involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke, there is no risk-free level of exposure. Immediate effects occur in the linings of the airways and in the cardiovascular system, increasing risks of heart attack.

Taverns and restaurants won't lose business or go out of business with a community-wide smoking ban.

According to the Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG) report released in February, "There is no reliable, independent scientific evidence to support these claims. Past experiences including evidence from Madison and Appleton, and scientific studies conducted in both rural and urban communities that have implemented smoke-free laws, have found such speculation to be false. U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona in his report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, concluded: 'evidence from peer-reviewed studies show that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse economic impact on the hospitality industry.'" (WISPIRG is an advocate for the public interest, according to its Web site, www.wispirg.org. It advocates for a smoke-free Wisconsin.)

Smoke-free policies don't infringe on your Constitutional rights.

Smokers may smoke in non-restricted areas, including their homes and vehicles. Smoke-free policies mean smokers must refrain from smoking in public buildings, including businesses where the public may be invited, and business owners must not allow smoking in their buildings. The smoke-free policy means everyone gets to breathe smoke-free air.

Banning burgers and other unhealthy foods is not up next.

Smoke-free laws protect public health. What a person eats affects only that person. Secondhand smoke affects everyone around the smoker.

A referendum to ban smoking in public buildings in Marshfield won't restrict churches from burning candles and incense or restaurants from using indoor grills.

The proposed legislation restricts "burning or holding a lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe or any other lighted smoking equipment" in public buildings. Altar candles and burger grills don't qualify as lighted smoking equipment.

It's a smoke screen from people who don't want further restrictions on their businesses.

Yet restaurants and taverns are heavily regulated already. They are checked for everything from signs on bathroom doors instructing employees to wash their hands to dates on food in the cooler. They must meet strict requirements to serve food and alcohol. They must restrict their sales of alcohol to patrons who are 21 or older. It's another regulation, and they won't give up without a fight.

It's the same fight fought in community after community where smoking bans have been introduced -- and passed.

We can't leave it to the Legislature to make it fair for all.

Lawmakers went home after working only 27 days in 15 months. Funny how they managed to not accomplish much of anything -- at least not anything of substance. It was stalling at its best -- or worst -- depending on your viewpoint.

There are no more excuses or arguments that hold water. Blow smoke at them and they fall apart.

Vote yes on the April 1 referendum to ban smoking in Marshfield.