

# Our Opinion

by Paula Dáil

## Still no smoking ban? Shameful

Because I so strongly believe in personal responsibility, I am conflicted about the smoking ban issue. When people are making bad choices, and these same choices endanger others, policy intervention is definitely called for – and this is where Wisconsin stands now regarding a state-wide smoking ban.

Given that the health risks associated with smoking are scientifically proven and widely known, yet people do it anyway, anything other than banning it in public places is flat out stupid.

Nevertheless, Senator Dale Schultz voted against the legislation creating a statewide smoking ban and the legislation has now stalled. So the rest of this editorial aims to enlighten Senator Schultz, and anyone else who thinks a smoking ban policy is a bad idea.

First, a little smoking ban history: Smoking bans are not a new concept. Pope Urban VII instituted the first known one in 1590 when he said he would excommunicate anyone who used tobacco in church, and this included chewing it, smoking it, or sniffing it. Excommunication is a pretty stiff penalty so this pope obviously had strong feelings about people polluting his cathedrals. Urban made a significant impact during his 13-day papal reign, because most of Europe followed his lead on this, and several countries adopted smoking bans for various public settings. These smoking bans stuck for over 400 years, and even today virtually no one smokes, or chews and spits, in church.

Fast forward to 2008 – the evidence supporting the negative effects of smoking on people who do it, and the serious health risks secondary smoke imposes on the people nearby who aren't doing it is solid and overwhelming. Further, there is no positive evidence to support smoking as a benign habit.

Since we know people who want to smoke will continue smoking, regardless of the risks, the public policy issue really concerns how to protect those who don't smoke from those who do. The obvious answer is to control the smokers – and the only sure-fire way to do this is to ban them from smoking in places where others are entitled to be, namely restaurants and bars.

Smoking ban opponents frequently use the argument that a smoking ban will negatively impact the lucrative Wisconsin tavern culture. The only way this can happen is if the ban is selective and not state-wide. Banning smoking in all Wisconsin bars and restaurants levels the economic playing field and smokers won't be tempted to move their patronage to a neighboring community where a no smoking ban exists.

And, all evidence is that uniform smoking bans actually help tavern and restaurant businesses because non-smokers, who are the vast majority of people, are now more apt to frequent these establishments, whereas previously, when there was no ban, they stayed away.

State government is in the position to make an obvious, no-brainer decision about whether to ban smoking in public venues, and it isn't happening, largely because certain lawmakers, including Senator Schultz, are using the "I support small business" argument to justify their vote against a statewide smoking ban. This is fallacious reasoning.

I urge Senator Schultz, and anyone else who opposes a statewide smoking ban, to do their homework and if they are not yet aware, inform themselves about the heinous health effects of smoking, as well as the myths surrounding negative effects of statewide smoking bans, which are now in place in 23 states and several countries worldwide, and working just fine.

Finally, I respectfully remind Senator Schultz that we do not elect our representatives to make stupid decisions that run counter to the common good or fail to promote and protect public health. And I urge anyone else who wishes to remind him of the same to do it. 1-800-978-8008.