

City of Cheyenne smoking ban. Health boon or wealth bane?

For the umpteenth time, I am not a smoker. I have never smoked. No one in my immediate family (wife, daughters, sons-in-laws, grandchildren) smoke.

I come from a smoking family (father and sibling) and I have lost friends and family at young ages to the ravages of smoking.

I hate smoking.

I wish everyone who now smokes would quit. I wouldn't lose any sleep if tobacco was banned in the United States. I know how addictive nicotine is even though I've never smoked a cigarette.

However, I am a capitalist. And I believe that the rash action of eight members of the city's governing body is wreaking catastrophe financial damage on bar operators in the city. Council members now seek cover from an irate group by claiming they voted for a "bar exemption." The bottom line is that all but two members of the governing body, including the mayor, voted for the smoking ban which includes bars and private clubs. Only Tom Segrave and Brent Beeman votes against it.

Bar owners now being financially crippled by lack of business they lay at the feet of the smoking ban must hold all eight of those who voted in support of the total ban accountable. All eight, not exempting any who supported a bar exemption amendment but still voted for the total ban.

On the Friday before this paper was printed, I visited some bars and spoke with some bar owners and operators. While my sampling was incomplete, it was probably just as legitimate as the Citizen's Survey which is sent repeatedly to the same area resident.

There is no question about the health hazards of smoking and secondhand smoke in my mind. None. And if I could wave a magic wand, all use of tobacco would cease. My 50 year-old nephew has been diagnosed with cancer of the wind-pipe and is undergoing chemotherapy after having withstood radiation treatments. He is not feeling well right now.

While outwardly fit, he has been a smoker all his adult life. Folks, he didn't get that cancer from drinking Papst Blue Ribbon or Diet Coke. He got it from smoking cigarettes - many of them in bars because that's where much of the social life is in small towns. He's not a bar fly. He's had a better career than most in Cheyenne and is eligible for retirement from his federal post and he must take it.

I explain this because I don't want anyone to think that I defend smoking or even condone it. I don't but unlike some, I am not paid to oppose smoking. I am not paid to travel the state to spread the message.

My philosophy, as stated on these pages many times, is that smoking should be banned where children can be present. They can be present in restaurants. Ban smoking. They can be present in retail stores. Ban smoking. While I personally had no major problems with conditions as they existed before the do-gooders voted to ban smoking in all public places, including places where I have no desire to be, I also witnessed parents with their babies in the former smoking sections of restaurants. I don't think they should do that to those tiny lungs and nothing short of a smoking ban could prevent their actions.

I know they take the same baby out to the SUV and strap them into a smoke-

filled compartment holding much more secondhand smoke than the restaurant area they just left. And I know they take that baby home and blow smoke in its face as they feed them their strained veggies.

I was okay with the separation into smoking and nonsmoking sections at restaurants. If I didn't like the way it was done, I didn't have to go there. And didn't.

But I would not opine in strong opposition to a smoking ban in restaurants. Many of the best restaurants have done that on their own so it cannot be devastating to the restaurant businesses.

Bars and private clubs are another matter. Once again, I don't have a favorite bar or club for which I am fighting a battle. I have been in only one bar in Cheyenne as a customer in the 20 years I've lived here. I had a beer with a guy I was interviewing to be a press operator - at the Cloud Nine. I was in Mingle's for the first time the other day - to interview a partner of the operation. In a typical year, I will drink maybe two beers at home.

So I don't care about their business troubles from a personal standpoint. If they all closed, it would not affect my behavior or my spending.

But what is happening to the operators I've spoken with is affecting them. "Big time," as Dick Cheney would say.

And when the bar owners/operators are affected, it has a ripple effect. A bartender told me the her tips were off by 60% since the smoking ban was put into effect.

Which is another thing. The smoking ban was passed well before Frontier Days and put into effect August 15th. The effective date was also just a week before the primary election. See the picture developing here?

I asked bar owners if anyone from the City or the paid sponsor of the smoking ban visited their establishment before the ban was passed. No, they did not. Why was such a visit important? Because when all other justifications for the smoking ban are exhausted, councilmen are now using the defense of "it benefits your employees."

Other than a WT-E editorialist, how many parents complained to city council members and the mayor about their children having to work in those establishments (bars) because they didn't have the experience or education to work elsewhere and smoke bothered them?

These bar owners told me that, to a person, every one of their employees smoke. Every single one. There are places where people with certain philosophical beliefs, health issues or physical conditions should not work. A bar, where two out of every three customers smoke, is one.

In a recent letter-to-the-editor in the other paper that was criticizing the ban asked where all the nonsmokers who had demanded the ban were now.

Non-smokers **DID NOT** demand this ban. This ban was the result of one paid activist and a handful of perhaps well-meaning elected officials who did not consider the ramifications of the extended ban.

For years, the primary proponent of a smoking ban only wanted it to apply to restaurants. To insure enough votes to pass that limited ban, he bartered a vote from someone who wanted the ban to apply to bars. Why private clubs were brought into the mix is anyone's guess. To tell the VFW and American Legion Clubs where military veterans who fought for the freedoms we all enjoy cannot "enjoy" a habit they have acquired, is unconscionable. There are, to the best of my knowledge, no military veterans on the city council or in the mayor's office.

One bar operator told me that he has had to cease charitable contributions. What will happen with sponsorship of ball teams? When asked why nonsmokers weren't coming in, I was told that without smokers, the number of people to socialize with had dropped by two-thirds and it took away the social aspect from the visit.

Another reminded me that a bartender can be paid as little as \$2.13 an hour (all don't pay the minimum) and should they lose their jobs because of lack of business, their unemployment will be calculated on that base pay, not including tips.

Employees are reporting not being able to pay their rent or utility bills. With children in school and bills to pay, they cannot wait out the storm. Some have already had to quit to find better paying jobs.

Bars with attached restaurants are feeling the pinch too. Patrons who would come in and have a couple beers before or after they ate their dinner after work, aren't eating in the restaurant anymore because they don't want to go into the bar and not be able to smoke.

Comparing Cheyenne to the college towns of Laramie, Greeley and Fort Collins also is invalid. Assuming those young people are of legal age, they are determined. A smoking ban with the ever-changing student base is different.

Customers are going outside bars to smoke. Those of us who used to be able to walk past that bar without being exposed to the secondhand smoke the ban was supposed to eliminate, now have to breathe it. Children who weren't exposed to it inside the bars - because they weren't allowed inside - now confront it outside the bar. Cigarettes litter the streets. So often, this legislation makes decisions without consideration. They've done it again with the smoking ban in bars.

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