

Smoke free workplaces protect working Alaskans

Posted: Monday, March 16, 2015 7:06 pm

To the editor:

If passed, SB 1, promoting smoke free workplaces, will protect working Alaskans and their families against the well established, well documented, costly and seriously adverse health effects of secondhand smoke. Close quarters tobacco smoke has a chokehold on a health care system that is already suffocating. Non-smokers are carrying a disproportionately large and unfair share of the health care burden created by smokers. The cost of protecting the unlimited right of smokers to expose themselves and unwilling others to the risk of disease and even death, has become too high.

There is of course, the legitimate question of smokers' rights. But the bill does not make smoking unlawful. Under SB 1, people will retain the right to smoke. However, they will not have the right to do so if, in exercising their rights, smokers expose others to an unreasonable risk of harm, or where the rights of a smoker, when exercised, eviscerate mine. The rights of smokers do not outweigh the rights of non-smokers to be protected against involuntary exposure to the health risks created by close quarters smoking.

Proponents of SB 1 already have made clear the enormous annual economic cost to Alaskans attributable to secondhand smoke. This should not be a partisan issue. Secondhand smoke kills adult non-smokers of all political persuasions. I do not want to be one of them. My sister was a lifelong chain smoker who lived with my parents for 25+ smoking years. My father, who never smoked a day in his life, died from esophageal cancer. We all grieved, my sister especially.

I support SB 1 not because I seek increased governmental regulation of private rights. To the contrary. But, I do expect my government to protect me against known, manageable risks to my health and safety. I empathize; I can see how smokers might feel stigmatized. I regret that. But, smoking in enclosed public places is not a private right that should be exempt from regulation. It does not only affect the individual exercising it. When I am in an enclosed space with someone who drinks alcohol, my chances of getting liver disease are not aggravated. There are personal choices people can make without exposing those merely in the same room with them to a potentially lethal disease. Smoking is not one. Choose, if you must, your own poison. But please, do not make it mine.

Helene M. Antel

Palmer

Yes to smoke-free workplaes

Frank Yaska Fairbanks | Posted: Wednesday, March 18, 2015 12:00 am

News-Miner letter to the editor:

March 13, 2015

To the editor: I've lived in Fairbanks for the past 17 years. My family's presence in Interior Alaska goes back generations. I work with a couple of coalitions, advocating protecting the health of local communities.

One of my largest concerns is secondhand smoke exposure. It's important to me because there is a higher prevalence rate of smokers in Interior villages, a whopping 40 percent, compared to the statewide smoking rate of 22 percent for adults. The No. 1 cause of death for Alaska Natives is cancer, and the No. 1 preventable cause of cancer is smoking.

My work involves Health Services and Tribal Communities. I work with clinic staff in prevention. I encourage tribal leaders to set their own measures to protect the health of their community members. I speak with youths about protecting their health and listen to what kind of future they want for their community.

As an educator, it's disheartening to see so many of my family and my Alaska Native people so dramatically affected by disease and premature death when it's preventable. I've seen a lot of people, a lot of Alaska Natives and non-natives, addicted to tobacco use. It sets a norm for the younger generation that it's OK to smoke, and to do it around people who don't smoke. Knowing the people I work to help are addicted and they're passing down their addictions to the next generation is difficult to deal with. I want to protect the overall health of everybody.

Our Alaska Native population is decreasing in number and in overall health. I see a statewide smoke-free workplace law as a good way to make that change.

A bill making its way through the Alaska Legislature would create a smoke-free workplace law. This is an easy way that our policy makers can help protect a large amount of the population from secondhand smoke exposure and the damage it causes. I hope our legislators, especially our Interior delegation, will support Senate Bill 1 and take this opportunity to stand up for the health of our current and future generations.

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Alaska Dispatch News
March 13, 2015

Supporting smoke-free workplace bill

Currently, only half of the state of Alaska is protected by a smoke-free workplace law. With a huge number of Alaskans working in the hospitality industry, it is important to protect our family members, friends, and colleagues from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke.

Everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air. No one should have to risk their health at work to be able to make a living, especially when people can take it outside. We all know the health effects from exposure to secondhand smoke, and no one should have to choose between their health and their job.

Implementing a statewide smoke-free workplace law will result in workers having a decreased number of days absent from work due to illness associated with exposure to secondhand smoke, decreased medical bills, and decreased visits to the emergency room.

For these reasons and as a hospitality employee, I support Senate Bill 1, Statewide Smokefree Workplaces, to protect all Alaskans from secondhand smoke.

— Amanda Lenhard
Anchorage

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Supports 'Take it Outside'

Posted: Thursday, March 5, 2015 8:33 pm

To the editor:

On behalf of the American Lung Association in Alaska, I'd like to thank Valley Residential Services for officially making Century Plaza, home to our Wasilla office, a smoke-free zone and establishing designated smoking areas well away from windows and doors. We believe everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air. Thanks to this new policy, Valley Residential Services is ensuring that right for all those who work, do business in, or visit, the Century Plaza.

Sadly, only about half of Alaska's population enjoys that same protection from secondhand smoke in the workplace. Secondhand smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, at least 69 of which are known to cause cancer. Secondhand-smoke exposure kills an estimated 50,000 Americans each year, and nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at work face a 30-percent increased risk of developing heart disease or lung cancer.

Senate Bill 1, the "Take it Outside" bill, would prohibit smoking in all indoor workplaces, thereby protecting all Alaskans from secondhand smoke at work. I urge our Valley delegation to fully support SB 1. It's time for a smoke-free Alaska, because everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air!

Becky Stoppa

American Lung Association in Alaska

health education manager Wasilla office



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Empire Editorial: Secondhand smoke is a threat statewide

Posted: February 26, 2015 - 1:00am

There's been a lot of talk lately about marijuana. We'd like to talk to you about tobacco instead.

We know: It's not as sexy a topic, but it's even more important. Each year, 40,000 Americans die from secondhand smoke-related illnesses. About 440,000 American smokers die each year from diseases attributed to their habit.

Next to those figures, marijuana isn't even a small potato. (Granted, we haven't studied marijuana as much as tobacco.)

Sen. Peter Micciche, a Republican from Soldotna, has an interesting proposal that would help reduce smoking's toll in Alaska. Senate Bill 1 proposes a statewide secondhand smoke law similar to the one enacted by the City and Borough of Juneau in 2008. It would ban smoking in bars, businesses, restaurants and other indoor locations. It would prohibit people from lighting up in select places outdoors, too. There would be no smoking in playgrounds, near the entrances to buildings or in outdoor stadiums.

E-cigarettes and vaporizers are covered, too. No one would be able to get their nicotine high in an airport or bus with those new electronic devices.

Almost half of Alaska's population lives in a place that already has such rules. Anchorage, Juneau, Klawock, Unalaska — there are plenty of Alaska communities that have already accepted the fact that secondhand smoke kills just as smoking does.

The fact is, even without considering the health benefits, it's simply nice to be able to go to a bar, a club or a restaurant and not come out smelling like smoke. Smoking is a habit that inflicts its harm directly and unavoidably upon others. It's time to banish it into the back alleys where it belongs. We've learned from other drugs — alcohol and marijuana — that outright prohibition doesn't work. That doesn't mean we have to tolerate the negative effects of smoking.

Fairbanks is the most populated place in Alaska without a secondhand smoke ordinance. Residents of that city have said they feel banning public smoking would be an unnecessary intrusion on their rights. We believe smokers shouldn't have the right to inflict their smoke upon others. As Zechariah Chaffee Jr. wrote in a 1919 issue of the Harvard Law Review, quoting another judge: "Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man's nose begins."

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Tobacco is target of new antismoking push in Legislature

E-cigarettes, smoking in public on the table

Posted: February 26, 2015 - 1:02am

By JAMES BROOKS

JUNEAU EMPIRE

Marijuana is old news. A pair of bills gathering support in the Alaska Legislature promise significant changes to limits on tobacco smoke in the 49th state.

HB40, sponsored by Rep. Bob Herron, D-Bethel, would add e-cigarettes to the state's antismoking laws. SB1, proposed by Sen. Peter Micciche, R-Soldotna, would prohibit smoking in public places, restaurants and bars across the state. SB1 would effectively spread the antismoking ordinances of Anchorage, Juneau and other Alaska municipalities to the rest of the state.

Herron and Micciche each said their bills should not be considered related.

"It's nothing against smokers, it's nothing against the users of e-cigarettes or people who like to vape," Micciche said of SB1. "It just says you should do that in a place that doesn't cause me to smoke, use an e-cigarette or vape. ... It's essentially the take-it-outside act."

If passed into law, the draft being considered by the Senate's Health and Social Services committee would prohibit smoking indoors at most public spaces. Smokers wouldn't be able to light up in a store, in a bus station, in a stadium, in a club, in an airport, in a school (public or private) and a long list of other places.

Smoking would also be prohibited in outdoor stadiums or amphitheaters, at playgrounds and near the entrances of places where smoking is prohibited.

"The bill is about protecting Alaska's workers," Micciche said, explaining that while a customer might be able to leave a business that allows smoking, that business's employees may not be able to.

And yes, marijuana is covered under SB1, whose definition of smoking includes "tobacco or plant product(s)."

There are exceptions to SB1: Smoke shops and clubs designed specifically for smoking can allow it. Smoking is also allowed on fishing boats working offshore. Fines may be levied on businesses that violate the law.

Herron said his bill is more limited; it simply adds e-cigarettes to the state's existing antismoking laws. It's inspired by an experience he had in Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport: and saw a young man using an e-cigarette while standing in front of an antismoking billboard. Standing with him were two young girls, presumably members of his family.

E-cigarettes and vaporizers — both of which function by using high heat to ignite controlled amounts of fluid or solid substances — are promoted as healthier alternatives to traditional tobacco smoking. Few studies have been conducted on the long-term health effects of e-cigarettes — studying them is complicated by the fact that there are hundreds of e-cigarette and vaporizer varieties — but preliminary scientific results show they emit chemicals similar to those in tobacco smoke, if not in the same quantity.

The negative health effects of smoking and secondhand smoke are well-known, and it is estimated that up to 40,000 Americans die each year as a result of secondhand smoke-related illnesses.

While SB1 has yet to emerge from committee and HB40 has not had a hearing, both are expected to face opposition from Alaskans concerned that the new legislation would infringe on their rights.

Fairbanks is the largest Alaska city that does not ban smoking in bars and restaurants. In a Feb. 11 hearing about SB1, Sen. Pete Kelly, a Republican from Fairbanks, said he's skeptical about secondhand smoke claims. "The junk science, that's what I'm particularly afraid of," he said. "Because we see it all the time in environmental issues. I mean, global warming is nonsense and yet people throw those statistics around like they're absolute hardcore facts. So that's what I just want to make sure — we're not dealing with junk science about 41,000 deaths."

One of the Alaskans who testified in support of SB1 at the hearing was Gerald Timmons of Fairbanks. Timmons is a 74-year-old nonsmoker and former smokejumper who now owns three car washes. He lives in Kelly's district and on Wednesday returned from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota where he has been undergoing intensive chemotherapy for lung cancer he attributes to growing up in and working in smoke-filled environments.

"Constantly, in offices, small conference rooms where I would be the only nonsmoker, and there would be smoke thick enough to cut with a knife," he said.

Timmons' type of cancer is particularly aggressive, and his odds are not good. Still, he's trying to stay optimistic and talked about the new drugs that may extend his life. "I've had a good life, but I want to continue it for a few more years," he said.

Timmons heard Kelly's comments at the Feb. 11 hearing. "I thought, Pete, please! If Anchorage and other (cities) can have a no-smoking in the workplace environment, (I can) at least push for that statewide. ... I'm going to work on Pete, believe me."

Timmons said he's concerned about the workers who might end up in the same position he's in. "I suspect it's probably the poorest among us, the dishwashers in some mom-and-pop restaurant somewhere, the waitresses, and they're in a smoky environment," he said. "It's not fair to any other employee."

- Contact news editor James Brooks at 523.2258 or at james.k.brooks@morris.com.

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Support smoke-free workplaces

Shalonda Riley Fairbanks | Posted: Thursday, February 26, 2015 12:00 am

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner Letter to the Editor:

Feb. 21, 2015

To the editor: I am so thrilled to learn that organizations such as American Lung Association, Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance Youth and many other beautiful organizations and individuals are encouraging our Legislature to consider a more healthy environment for employees. I myself suffer from so many respiratory issues and I desire to breathe much better.

There are so many people in the beautiful city of Fairbanks who are affected by the thousands and thousands of chemicals that come from cigarettes and e-cigarettes. This is unjust to those that desire a cleaner and more efficient life. Unfortunately, some employees (against their will) are having to force down demonic cancer-causing heart disease fumes while working to provide for themselves and their families. This is costing the workplace so much more money for employers to insure their employees than the handful of potential employees or customers that may be lost for a small moment of time.

I so enjoy an employer and business that put my health first. Thank you so much and please let us support the many lives that make up the beautiful city of Fairbanks. Please support smoke-free workplaces.

don't smoke, don't start. If you do for God's sake quit. You may fail many times. Don't give up. Keep quitting.

As for these e-cigs, these are not a solution to quitting smoking. They are a con. Don't fall for them. Save your money, save your life and try to live smoke and vapor free. That choice I leave to you.

Wasilla resident Daniel D. Grota retired from the U.S. Army after more than 21 years of service.

Smoking, or vaping, bad news both ways

By Dan Grota | Posted: Thursday, February 19, 2015 8:42 pm

I'm on the road a lot for my day job and so are the tunes on the radio — mostly classic rock from various stations. I enjoy listening while I drive all over the Valley. The songs keep me awake and alert on Alaska's roads.

Lately, I have heard ads pop up about discount tobacco stores and E cigarettes around the Valley. Some even offer discounts for e-cigarette products for those trying to quit smoking traditional cigarettes. These attempts to cross over to e-cigarettes that go by the slang vapes or vaping are disturbing to me.

It irked me more and more as each ad replayed on the air. Let me tell you something: if you are going to quit smoking, quit completely. Don't get suckered into e-cigarettes. That isn't quitting, that is just changing to another nicotine delivery system. What good is that?

Look, I was a smoker for more than 30 years. Now I can tack on proudly the term "former" in front of smoker. I quit the really hard way and paid a heavy price. Heck I'll still be paying for all those years smoking for the rest of my life. Take it from me, this vaping thing is just more bad news in a pretty package.

Liquid nicotine isn't the only thing being vaporized in an e-cig. Solvents like propylene glycol, formaldehyde, glycerin and even the liquid flavorings make up the vapor mix. At least two of those chemicals are found in antifreeze and embalming fluid. The huge chemical mix in tobacco smoke and its affects on human body also is well known from decades of medical studies. Less is known about the long-term effects of the e-cigarette. They haven't been around that long. While they may be cheaper, as makers of the devices allege, and maybe safer than the traditional cigarette, they are still just another unwanted health risk to the unsuspecting. Take that "maybe" with a 50-pound grain of salt.

Maybe e-cigarettes are the lesser of the two evils — there's that word again — but the research shows they are far from benign. There is talk about including e-cigs in the smoking bans being proposed and debated in the Valley and the state. I believe this is the right action to take. I feel they should be banned from advertising on the airwaves like cigarettes were from TV and radio back in the late '60s and early '70s.

Now I can't tell you the adult reader what to do in life with choices of this nature. As a former smoker who loves living life each day as a blessing, I can only ask you with all my heart — if you

Supports smoke-free bill

Posted: Thursday, January 15, 2015 7:58 pm

To the editor:

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 1, Statewide Smokefree Workplaces. In the past two years, I have lost two aunts who were very dear to me. Both were young, and both were chain smokers. Over the past 20 years, I have watched numerous aunts, uncles and cousins die from smoking-related illnesses. My Mom worked as a waitress in a restaurant with a smoking section while I was growing up, but never smoked herself. She now suffers from asthma. I have never smoked either, but I often spent time at the restaurant with her, was babysat by a smoker, and traveled frequently on planes with smoking sections. As a result, I was diagnosed with COPD at the age of 17.

While visiting the WWII and Vietnam Memorials in Washington D.C. this past April, I was brought to tears to learn that over 405,000 Americans died fighting in WWII, and over 58,000 Americans died in Vietnam. It was then that I realized the catastrophic loss that tobacco use and secondhand smoke causes. 440,000 Americans die each year from tobacco-related illnesses. That's 1,200 preventable deaths each and every day. Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death in the U.S., and it is a worldwide epidemic.

I encourage our local legislators to take SB1 very seriously to protect our residents here in the Mat-Su Valley and around the state from the dangers of nicotine addiction, tobacco use and secondhand smoke. Thank you.

Misty Jensen

Mat-Su Valley resident

Celebrating smoke free

Posted: Monday, January 12, 2015 7:42 pm

Do you remember what the debate about anti-smoking ordinances sounded like in 2012?

That was when the issue came to Palmer.

Bar owners worried that money would flow out of their establishments and into nearby watering holes like Four Corners Lounge on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and Del Rois in Butte, both of which reside outside city limits in unincorporated areas of the Mat-Su Borough.

Bar owners said it would be a double-whammy as they would be forced to spend money to set up a place for people to smoke and then they would lose money as smokers departed.

That smoking ban in Palmer went into effect right after the start of the new year in 2013.

January 2015 is probably a good time, then, to take a look at how those predictions panned out and, from this vantage point, it's not looking so good for the prognosticators.

We don't, obviously, have access to their books, but all outward signs seem to indicate that the bar scene in Palmer is doing just fine.

There are bars expanding and renovating there. Klondike Mike's morphed into Klondike Mike's Saloon and Roadhouse BBQ, a change that reflected expanded food offerings and a remodeled interior. The Moosehead Saloon also was the site of much construction activity this summer.

The Eagle Hotel, Restaurant and Lounge reopened in September 2012, just before the smoking ban took effect.

We mention these businesses because they are all in downtown Palmer, all forced to go smoke free by the public smoking ban, and all still in business.

Meanwhile, Del Rois may or may not have benefited from an exodus of smokers but, it has since gone out of business.

We're happy to say the sky didn't fall. And no businesses closed their doors in the wake of the Valley's first public smoking ban.

We hoped this would be the outcome. But there is more than hope at work here. We also were among those Valley residents who showed our support for these establishments by joining our friends and neighbors in sharing a meal and enjoying a few drinks at the businesses specifically impacted by the ban. And we made new friends and found new favorite watering holes in the process.

Palmer was not the first community in Alaska to ban smoking in bars. Bars there weren't even the first in the Valley to go smoke-free. Tailgaters and the Windbreak in Wasilla and the Caboose in Palmer made the jump well before voters banned smoking in Palmer. Though outside city limits, the Palmer Elks Lodge on Finger Lake went smoke-free voluntarily through a vote of its members after the ban went into effect.

Palmer, it seems, is part of a greater trend. Other communities are likely to go smoke free. In fact, the very first bill for the 2015 session of the Alaska Legislature has to do with smoking. Senate Bill 1 would be, in effect, a statewide ban on smoking in workplaces.

As we consider this statewide rule change, we think Palmer's experience should help inform the conversation. Smoke free ordinances do not squelch business. They do quite the opposite.

Senate Bill 1 will protect all workers

Posted: Monday, January 12, 2015 7:47 pm

To the editor:

Secondhand smoke kills. The Surgeon General said it best in his 2006 update to the Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke:

“The debate is over, the science is clear. There is no safe level of secondhand smoke.”

Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds, including hundreds that are toxic and at least 69 that cause cancer. Non-smokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their heart disease and lung cancer risk by up to 30 percent. Everyone deserves the right to breathe smoke-free air.

Unfortunately, only about 50 percent of Alaska is covered by smoke-free ordinances. Senate Bill 1, if passed will protect all workers in Alaska from exposure to deadly secondhand smoke. Nobody should have to choose between their health and a paycheck.

Senate Bill 1: It's about health and it's about time.

Ashley Peltier

Wasilla

Time for smoke-free workplaces

Dean Gustafson Fairbanks | Posted: Sunday, December 21, 2014 11:19 pm

To the editor: I've been a resident of Alaska since 1999. I've seen Alaska, and specifically Fairbanks, grow as a community. I've enjoyed many of the changes that have occurred during my residence in Alaska. I believe one of the changes we need to make in this state is to have smoke-free indoor workplaces.

There are still bars and restaurants that allow smoking in Fairbanks. I find this to be quite unacceptable and disturbing. Smoking is a public health issue, and we still allow smoking inside buildings and workplaces. The correlation between smoking and lung cancer is undeniable. Going to the store to buy groceries has become a hazard to my family as we have to walk by smokers inhaling carcinogens in front of store entrances. Perhaps if the smoker was smoking a certain distance from the entrance, it would not be so harmful to my family and me.

I often feel sorry for individuals who are employed in bars and restaurants that allow smoking and cannot leave their job because of financial constraints. It seems like in many instances, employees are stuck working in environments where smoking is permitted indoors simply because they aren't afforded the same opportunities as others. I frequently worry for individuals with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease who cannot take the effects of cigarette smoke. Recently, the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District passed a comprehensive tobacco policy within their district, and the University of Alaska is going to have smoke-free campuses. It appears as though Alaskans want smoke-free environments. When will we have smoke-free indoor workplaces? This is a public health concern within our community.