



County ‘Dons’ keep selling smoke-free agenda

By Jim Waters

A smoking-ban “family” of government officials and health nuts wants to make some Northern Kentucky residents “an offer they can’t refuse.”

Think of it as “The Godfather,” Kentucky style.

Ever since Lexington enacted Kentucky’s first government-mandated smoking ban in 2004, these “Dons” have pushed for government-imposed [smoking bans](#) on private property, primarily restaurants and bars in Northern Kentucky. They continue to twist arms to get bans in Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties.

One of their “associates,” [Ellen Hahn](#), a registered nurse and self-anointed smoking-ban leader, even uses federal stimulus money to finance her efforts. Last year, Hahn [snatched \\$300,000](#) of *your tax dollars* just to harass Kentucky communities.

But smoking-ban proponents have a particularly difficult time in the north largely because of [Northern Kentucky Choice](#), a group that argues effectively that Hahn’s whole smoke-free house of cards is based on a shaky foundation of bad economic analysis and flawed logic.

Ken Moellman, Choice spokesman, says his group wants officials to understand that the debate on the economic impact of a government-mandated smoking ban is anything but over — as Hahn repeatedly claims.

“The quote ‘science’ end quote behind the economic effect of a smoking ban is questionable at best and dishonest at worst,” Moellman said. Hahn’s research, which pro-ban officials rely upon, offers no raw data and cherry picks from research done by others, he said.

Ironically, smoking-ban proponents may become victims of their own success.

The longer bans remain in place, the more the evidence — and common sense — condemns the Pollyanna economic views of Hahn and her fellow smoking-ban worshippers.

For instance, in the St. Louis Fed, the publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Michael Pakko [pushes through](#) the smoke-and-mirrors to show that government-imposed smoking bans exact a negative economic impact on businesses frequented by smokers.

Pakko cites a study of restaurant sales that spanned a quarter-century and 267 California cities, where economists Robert Fleck and Andrew Hanssen discovered government-imposed smoking bans resulted in drops in revenue by a super-sized 4 percent — a substantial decline considering most restaurants operate on a very thin profit margin.

These facts are ignored by Hahn, who must justify getting federal money by citing “accomplishments” — even those that erode freedom and small business owners’ constitutionally endorsed private-property rights. And of course, she and her fellow ban supporters deny the economic impact of a smoking ban.

What's puzzling is why the three judge executives in these Northern Kentucky counties — all Republicans — want to climb into a black limousine loaded with junk science and bad economics thugs.

They claim to have the fiscal court votes in Kenton and Campbell counties but that Boone County holds out. Look out. The limo is pulling up.

Ralph Drees, Kenton County judge executive, wants all three counties to pass the same ban at the same time. That way, restaurant and bar owners become trapped. Otherwise, Boone County could benefit economically by attracting restaurant owners who would move businesses to a ban-free county.

This demonstrates that while Hahn may not admit the economic consequence of a smoking ban, the judge executives surely understand it.

Don Vito Corleone in "The Godfather" once admonished, "Never let anyone outside the family know what you're thinking." So, the judge executives have kept the proposal under wraps.

Why don't they want the folks to see it?

Drees told reporters that he might consider a plan that would have Kenton and Campbell counties pass a ban and "maybe that'll help push Boone County."

It's possible these conscientious Boone County leaders who rightly oppose the government coercion of these proposed smoking bans will interpret this as an "offer they can't refuse."

Perhaps they will anyhow.

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