



# Huffing and puffing against lighting up, smoking bans

By Jim Waters

“Why waste a column on smoking bans?” a friend asked me. “You’ve got bigger fish to fry.”

Or cigars to smoke — as the case may be.

Just kidding. You’ve heard of teetotalers. Well, I’m a smoke-totaler.

In fact, the level of rudeness among Kentucky’s smoke-a-holics never ceases to amaze me.

My favorites are puffers who light up while remaining oblivious to diners — usually in a crowded establishment. Rather than finishing or extinguishing their unfinished cigarettes, these considerate-challenged puffers invariably allow their smoldering cancer sticks to continue to fume while they eat and diners nearby fume because they cannot enjoy a smoke-free meal. And the smoke never drifts back to the smoker. Instead, it finds my face, my nostrils and every cell in my eyes.

“Please blow your smoke in another direction,” I say, wanting to add, “preferably while standing outside on the opposite side of town.”

So, if you still think after reading this week’s fare that I’m attempting to justify this malodorous habit, I’m going to ask: “What have *you* been smoking?”

Again, don’t think that I am unaware of the potential harm from secondhand smoke. I do not take the family — including three young daughters — into chimney stacks posing as restaurants on dining-out nights. Even though the scientific jury remains hung on just how much damage secondhand smoke causes, I choose not to place my family at risk.

But truth be told, the “itsy-intemeters” of nicotine I inadvertently inhale while eating a scrumptious quarter-pound cheeseburger and writing this column at the Lunch Box Café across the street from the office don’t pose near the threat to my health that government nanny-types do to our freedom. They claim to have heard some divine calling to limit the liberties of restaurant and bar owners “for their own good.”

For the record, Sam — the café’s Cambodian owner — has neither banned smoking nor started accepting credit cards. But these self-anointed government officials and their smoking nannies won’t rest until nary a lighted cigarette smolders on any public or private property. They contend the only smoke that should be allowed at the “Lunch Box Café’s” of Kentucky is that of the slow-cooking barbecue out back.

They also find Kentucky restaurant owners incapable of deciding business smoking policies — unless, of course, you’re a politically powerful entity such as Churchill Downs Inc. Then you can get exempted from restrictive smoking bans, including Louisville’s expanded ordinance set to go into effect July 1.

Don’t be confused by the smoke screen laid down by the cigarette police.

If this was *really* about the health of residents or employees – as the smoking nannies and their political masters swear – isn't the health of Churchill Downs' workers as important as the politically unconnected workers at the Lunch Box Café?

If so, how could this exemption occur? Do we really want to know?

What I do know is that the arguments favoring the erosion of our freedoms deserve to have a warning label wrapped around them that reads: "Government's continued meddling in the lives of Kentuckians has been found to be dangerous to our liberty."

Think about it.

Smoking in the United States has been in decline since the early 1960s. The educational efforts of government and nonprofits such as the American Cancer Society work! Many public establishments have voluntarily hung smoke-free signs on their doors. As a result, an increasing number of establishments allow patrons to dine – and workers to ply their trade – without risking their health.

I understand my friend's reasoning. And if the issue were just about government-imposed smoking bans – which seem all the rage across the commonwealth these days – then he might have a point. But don't look for these nannies – usually funded by some government grant – to stop with smoking bans.

Since most Kentuckians with any sense despise smoking and its haze, they are too eager to go along with this intrusion into their liberty. But what happens when the nanny police target something they *don't* consider within government's purview? Then what?

In fact, even as I write, I'm keeping an eye out for the nagging nannies with blood oozing from their lips like a wolf after a fresh kill ready to move in for their next victim – red-meat consumers!

I think I might see one. Now what?

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