



Input from the people would offer a breath of fresh air

By Jim Waters

If you thought the days of political deals made in smoke-filled back rooms ended, think again.

Of course, political correctness demands that those rooms now be smoke-free. Otherwise it's business as usual in some Northern Kentucky counties, where good-ole-boy politicians "discreetly" explore ways to trample on private-property rights via government-imposed smoking bans.

So far, the process involves minimal public input or sharing of a proposed ordinance with the affected towns.

"It's never been publicly discussed," said Steve Megerle, Covington city commissioner. "I have a problem when the county is deciding to pass some kind of ordinance or regulation which will affect business in my city without any input or contact whatsoever with the city government."

Or, allow me to add, from residents.

While claiming overwhelming support for smoking bans, pro-smoking ban officials in Northern Kentucky apparently loathe the thought of having public hearings to allow expression of all that love.

If they believe residents embrace such restrictions, they should visit Fitzgerald's Cigar Bar in Covington's cozy MainStrasse Village. I'm fairly certain that the opinions they find from customers who learn government nannies want to harass them into political correctness won't hold a whole lot of "love."

After Ohio enacted its statewide smoking ban last year, cigar bars in Cincinnati across the river from Northern Kentucky closed. Responding to market demands, Fitzgerald's opened.

"A lot of people are coming over from Ohio to Kentucky to have a cocktail and a smoke," Megerle said.

Does that sound like grounds for overwhelming support for a smoking ban to you?

A word to the unwise Royal Regulators in the Buckeye State: Tax-and-spend behavior coupled with policies encroaching upon the freedoms of residents and business owners come with consequences. The recent "Rich States, Poor States" report by the American Legislative Exchange Council ranks Ohio ahead of only three states in economic competitiveness.

Even Kentucky does better. Of course, if the bureaucrats who run the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce have their way, we would land at the bottom of the heap.

The chamber, which pushed for a statewide smoking ban during this year's legislative session, might get embarrassed if it cannot even get a ban in its own back yard. But that's all right. Better for it to get embarrassed than for residents and businesses to lose more freedom.

Like most smoking nannies, "Chamber-crats" point to less-than-credible research.

They claim a recent survey of members indicated overwhelming support for a government-imposed smoking ban. Yet, only 30 percent of the chamber's members expressed support "for some kind of ban."

In an editorial blog, Dennis Hetzel, Kentucky Enquirer general manager, called that "an amazing response."

I suppose it would also be "amazing" if I found the same number of respondents who believe the moon is made out of cheese. But it doesn't mean there's overwhelming support for that view.

Additional skewed "research" comes from Northern Kentucky Action, a group for which Smoking Nannies Inc. would make a more appropriate name. Typical of the approach of such groups, it claims overwhelming support for a government-imposed ban based on a survey with a minute sample size.

"The people who have been polled are supporters of this," Megerle said. "But that's one constituency. There's numerous constituencies affected by this."

You and I both know that these surveys don't take place in Bingo halls, bowling alleys or Mom-And-Pop Corner Cupboard diners, where the locals meet every morning to drink coffee, light up and bemoan the expansion of the Nanny state.

They deserve a hearing, too.

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