

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Point and Counterpoint: Smoking in bars and restaurants

By Kate Kelecseny
opinion editor

There are numerous societal issues that are thrown in our faces everyday. The current Senate race between Rick Santorum and Bob Casey showcase the problems that are evident within our district and surrounding counties. However, I find it amusing that one of the most important issues facing the public is absent from both of their proposed initiatives: smoking.

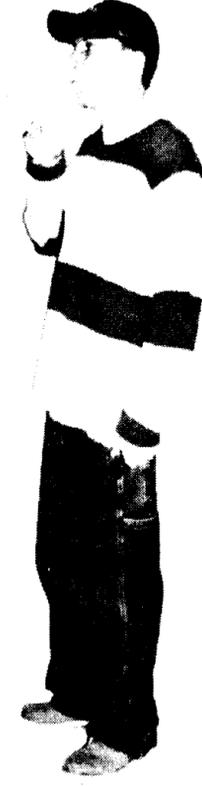
According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 3,000 non-smokers die from lung cancer and 35,000 non-smokers die from heart disease each year due to second-hand smoke. Cigarettes kill more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide and illegal drugs combined. My perspective is not merely to approve or condemn the practice. However, I feel that the choice to smoke should be made by the individual, and should not be forced upon non-smokers by a restaurant, bar and the other customers.

Currently, there is no legislation in Pennsylvania banning smoking in restaurants and bars. However, after the first of the year, Philadelphia will ban smoking in restaurants and in bars which also serve food. Ten states have yet to take any stance at all on the issue. Several states have been fighting the issue for years, one of which is Ohio, which has banned smoking in restaurants and in bars in Columbus since February of 2005.

I understand that for most people, drinking and bars are associated with smoking. With that in mind, do most people also associate restaurants with smoking? I highly doubt that a thin glass wall placed in restaurants in order to divide the two sections regulates the distribution of smoke within the restaurant or prevents it from dispersing into the labeled non-smoking areas. I find it unfair to those consumers who choose a certain restaurant, ask to be seated in the non-smoking area, and then are placed in the proximity of that thin glass wall, if there is even a barrier at all.

I have heard that several establishments, both restaurants and bars, only permit smoking within certain hours and go so far as to limit smoking to certain days. According to the American Lung Association, a recent study concluded that second-hand smoke lingers in the air for several hours after the cigarette is put out. I admit that restricting the hours in which one can smoke in a public facility is a step in the right direction. However, it seems rather foolish, considering smoke lingers and is still harmful hours later. Why not ban it altogether?

There are many arguments on the other side of the



By Nick Underhill
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issue, one being that business often feel threatened and could potentially lose business should there be government legislation. There have been many studies done to test how such a ban affects the revenue of a business. In 2002, a study was performed in El Paso, Texas comparing their income before and after the ban. There was very little change. A 2006 US Surgeon General review of studies suggests that businesses may actually improve economically. Principally, research indicates that business incomes remain stable, if not improve, as a result of a ban in smoking.

Again, I am not condemning smoking. I am, however, disapproving of it in public places where not everyone in the facility chooses to smoke. In my opinion, barriers in restaurants and bars aren't enough. I know that it is difficult to disassociate smoking with bars and I also understand that it could be an inconvenience for smokers to have to leave in order to smoke outside. Yet, it is also an inconvenience for those who do not smoke, or are allergic to smoke, to have to be in the presence of it while eating dinner or socializing with friends.

Cigarettes kill more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide and illegal drugs combined.

Not being able to smoke in a bar is like agreeing to go out on a date with a girl after she has already told you that there will be no goodnight kiss, not tonight, not the next time you go out, never.

After you spend \$50 on the date, you walk home depressed and feeling as if something were missing. Then you realize that you should have just stayed at home or found somewhere else to go where you could have at least got what you desired and not had such a simple inane pleasure withheld from you so that someone else's pursuit of happiness wasn't infringed upon.

That's exactly what it might be like every night for the smoking public in the near future, after Pennsylvania passes House Bill 1489, which would ban smoking in all public places including bars, restaurants and sporting events.

It was bad enough when we were quarantined to the dark, undesirable, back corners like a bunch of trolls that weren't fit to be seen by the beautiful people that got to sit in the lighted areas, but now they want to get rid of us all

together. I can maybe understand the ban in restaurants, or even at sporting events, but bars? Bars?! According to Mothers Against Dumb Decisions, only 23.6 percent of adult citizens residing in Pennsylvania smoke. I'm sure that number climbs a little among college students when they go out to the bar and get a little buzzed up; we all have those friends that suddenly start asking us for a smoke every 20 minutes when they're drinking. How can you blame them though? The two go hand in hand, like Laverne and Shirley or Bonnie and Clyde. There's nothing better once you start drinking than the smooth taste of a menthol cigarette, except maybe getting that goodnight kiss, or even an invite inside her house, but we'll leave that topic alone for now.

I just can't fathom how this will be a positive thing, even for those that are worried about their health and don't want to be exposed to second hand smoke; like a year or two is really that much to sacrifice so that we can blow smoke in your face. Seriously though, even those of you that are health conscious, how much fun is it going to be the next time you go to Jimmy-Z's and the place is empty because no one is allowed to smoke? A lot of bar owners feel that this will increase business, but refuse to acknowledge that this law might cause them to take a hit fiscally. As a smoker, I would rather go pick up a case and sit in my living room and get drunk with my friends that also share my bad habit. I'm willing to bet that the other members of our clique would rather join us then go out alone. Just imagine, the next time you go to the Cell Block, Peccadillo's, or even Teasers, and every half hour your friends go outside to smoke. By the time they have their Newport and go back through security, nearly a half hour has passed. I doubt that will be an enjoyable night for you, and now your friends' habit has become an inconvenience for you as much as it has for them.

After the initial transition of getting used to not being allowed to smoke in places where it was once habitual, I'm sure that the smokers will adjust and will tell many tales of the good old days when they could sit around and take a drag at will. But things are going to be rocky at first. It's not that big of a deal to go outside and smoke from April to September, but people are not going to be happy once the winter months hit. Also, once you throw a little alcohol in the mix, there will be a few incidents before the smoke clears on this thing.

What it all boils down to is the fact that my pursuit of happiness is being blocked by your need to be healthy. I'm already killing myself, so why should I care who comes along with me?

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Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to k1k5005@psu.edu or directly to the Beacon office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication.

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Harambee's 20th Anniversary
- Parents and Families Weekend
- Horror movie season
- Warm sweaters
- Pumpkin pie!

Beacon Thumbs Down



- No sunshine
- Wrigley's coffee-flavored gum
- Bruno's lack of nutritional information
- Activities that start late
- Pulling all-nighters during the week



Have a Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down?



(circle one)

Address it to the Beacon and submit it to the RUB desk