

Lawmakers predict smoking ban will pass

But many say it shouldn't be imposed by state

Friday, January 26, 2007

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OF COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

SPRINGFIELD - While most central Illinois lawmakers say they oppose legislation to ban indoor smoking statewide, many also predicted the proposal would win legislative approval.

Peorians will vote in a non-binding referendum April 17 on whether the state legislature should approve a bill to ban smoking at workplaces, as well as restaurants, bars and other indoor public places.

The legislation was introduced in the Illinois Senate earlier this month by state Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago.

Rep. David Leitch, R-Peoria, and Sen. Dan Rutherford, R-Chenoa, prefers keeping in place a law passed last year allowing Illinois municipalities to decide for themselves whether they should have a smoking ban.

A smoking ban "would be a mandate that I would not be comfortable supporting," Leitch said.

Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington, said he is concerned about the proposed ban.

"I won't support it, because I continue to side on the rights of less government and private property rights," Brady said. "If you don't want to go into property that has smoking, you shouldn't go in. People can vote with their feet."

Sen. Dave Koehler, D-Peoria, said he supports a smoking ban "as a health concern." But he also said that he may push to allow exemptions for bars that meet certain ventilation requirements.

If smokers can't light up in a bar, Koehler said, they often crowd outside the bar to smoke. That can be a nuisance, especially in older neighborhoods where a bar is often adjacent to residential buildings, he said.

"If it looks to be like this is going to be an important exemption for both the business community and other groups that might be affected, like neighborhoods, then I think we should allow for something like that," Koehler said.

Some Peoria-area lawmakers are still on the fence about a statewide ban.

Sen. Dale Risinger, R-Peoria, said he is still asking mayors of communities in his district what they think about the proposal.

"A lot of the mayors would just as soon that we do something statewide rather than leave it up to them," he said. "Particularly if there's another community close by that won't act on it, they're reluctant to impose their will on the businesses and hurt the sales tax."

Rep. Aaron Schock, R-Peoria, said he hasn't yet had a chance to examine the legislation.

However, Schock said his office has received "scores of calls from constituents who are concerned about the impact on small businesses - and rightfully so."

"Overall, I'm against private intrusion in people's lives," Schock said.

Reps. Mike Smith, D-Canton, and Keith Sommer, R-Morton, did not respond to phone calls seeking comment.

Risinger said speedy legislative action on the ban might end up making the April referendum a moot point.

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