

These days, being a smoker can be a difficult job

It sure is hard being a smoker these days. Everytime I go into a restaurant, it seems that fewer and fewer are asking me "smoking or non-smoking?"

California recently passed a law — scheduled to take effect early next year — that would prohibit smoking in all indoor spaces where someone may be employed. In some cities, it is now illegal to smoke within 50 feet of a doorway on the street.

The recent inquiry into the cigarette companies' ethics has brought on a slew of accompanying articles on how bad smoking is for you.

All this, and the dirty looks from my non-smoking friends and people who pass me on the street — it's enough to make one want to quit. Which is exactly what the federal government would like, no doubt.

Aside from all the health risks smoking poses to just about everyone, it is a terrible burden on the public health dollar. Health insurance holders suffer higher premiums to pay for those who have contracted cancer or heart disease as a result of smoking.

"These are all valid reasons to promote the prohibition of ciga-



PAUL VAN SICKLE

rette smoking," one might say, and I tend to agree. But I am curious as to whether smokers might be being deprived of the right (a questionable one to be sure) to poison themselves — the right to enjoy a safe, recreational drug that has been cultivated for hundreds of years.

During a recent debate with one of my roommates on the topic, she informed me that although you have as much a right to poison yourself with your own smoking, you don't have the right to poison anyone else with that habit. She is a strong proponent of banning smoking in all public places, even parks.

I responded, "In the open air, there is such a dilution of the smoke, how can there be much of a risk to non-smokers?"

To which she emphatically replied, "Suppose there is a

child playing close to the park bench on which you are smoking? What is the risk to that child? Even if there is the smallest risk to anyone, especially children, shouldn't we try to eliminate it? What gives you the right to take your habit, and force it (literally) down other people's throats?"

I don't have an answer for that. I agree, I don't have that right, but where can we compromise? A smoker has the right to smoke and a non-smoker has the right not to breathe a smoker's smoke. But can we say that just because smokers are now in the minority (this was not always the case) they can only smoke in the privacy of their homes?

Not even this right for smokers is completely secure. Suppose someone conducted his or her private business from home, where the only office was located? Not all that long ago, smoking was permitted in movie theaters and even lecture halls.

Now, if the federal government has its way, no one will smoke in the United States. Smokers have slowly been pushed from their businesses, the airlines, and now are rel-

egated to smoking 50 feet from the door of the place they might work, or live.

I find it strange that the rights of an entire demographic are systematically being taken away, and no one has anything to say about it, save for the cigarette companies, who have their own greed-motivated agenda. Maybe I have some solutions.

First of all, we need to deal with the tobacco companies. Their disregard for the American public is in no way acceptable. They have turned what might have been just a recreational activity into an assured addiction only for the health of their pocketbooks.

Cigarettes should be regulated, just like any other drug, and the manufacturers shouldn't be permitted to monkey with the nicotine level (an irresponsible activity at the least, dangerous at the worst) without the consumer's knowledge.

We also need to pass legislation that excludes diseases directly resulting from cigarette smoking from being covered under insurance, federal or otherwise.

Restaurants should be able to make their own decisions as to

whether to offer smoking sections or not.

The state could retain control over the configuration of these smoking sections, i.e. ventilation, dividing walls etc.

Taxation of tobacco products should continue, as this is an invaluable source of state income. I know from experience that if true inflexible demand exists for any product, it is cigarettes. Perhaps this money could be put toward health programs; drug and alcohol abuse prevention, for instance.

My hope is that non-smokers can feel good about letting smokers exercise their right to be unhealthy. Providing, of course, protection for everyone else. I believe that a world exists where smokers and nonsmokers can co-exist. All it needs in order to be realized is some low-level control on the part of the government, some social self-responsibility on the part of the tobacco companies, and a high degree of cooperation from the smokers themselves.

Paul VanSickle will be a columnist for the Emerald in the fall.

LETTERS

Unsafe campus

Beware of red-necks, neo-Nazis and other types of nuts who want to harass foreign and foreign-looking students on campus. I am from Korea and I was recently harassed by three racists who are not University students. They are usually on motorcycles and hang out on Kincaid Street. Their tactic is to approach you with all sorts of swear words and racial slurs. Physical threat is accompanied when you counter their verbal abuses.

Kincaid Street has been a haven for all kinds of people who have no business with the University. The bar on the corner of 13th Avenue and Kincaid was once busted by police for alleged drug dealings on the premises. A few months ago, my wife and I were also annoyed by an alcoholic while waiting for a bus. The person was asking for money and later showed us his knife.

Kincaid Street is getting worse than before — now, it is becoming a gathering place for motorcycle gangs. However, neither the police nor the University is doing anything to fight the crime these people commit. Although the street is clearly dangerous for the wellbeing of not only foreign but all University students, routine police patrol is missing. The city is busy checking parking meters but is not interested in protecting students from dangers. So, beware!

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Lynch 'em

I would like to applaud Stephen Crawford in his upholding of Christian values and the rights of the majority to rule (*ODE*, July 19). However, some of his information is, in fact, in error. John Locke was not a Christian. He was a deist, as were a lot of the framers of the Constitution, including Thomas Jefferson. They were much too liberal when they wrote the Constitution and if fact promoted the Constitution as protecting minorities from "the tyranny of the majority," in the *Federalist Papers*.

The Constitution is much too liberal and many changes need to be made. The First Amendment should be changed to read that people have the right to be Christian and to exercise free speech only so long as it is pro-Christian. We also need to bring back lynching. Too many homosexuals are allowed to enjoy citizenship simply because of due process of law. If the majority of this state, this city, or even of an angry mob think that it is OK to lynch someone, then the law should support them. A few good heterosexuals may be lynched by mistake, but why take chances? Kill them all, and let God sort them out!

Oh, the P.C. liberals will complain about civil liberties and basic human rights, but this is a Christian nation and those that don't like it can leave. After all, when you use the Bible to justify your actions, you can do no wrong.

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LETTERS POLICY

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