

Enact smoking ban in '09

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When the Legislature convenes in January, Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary, will repeat a bold step he took two years ago. Once again he will try to enact legislation that will ban smoking in all public places in Indiana.

And once again Brown will face opposition from such groups as the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association and the Indiana Casino Association, whose members believe such a ban would hurt their businesses.

We again support Brown's legislation. Perhaps this time around Brown will have a much stronger voice behind him in the Indiana Coalition for Smokefree Air, a consortium of some 30-plus groups that advocate a smoking ban.

The facts are stacked against smoking and the harm caused by secondhand smoke. Come January, 33 states will have statewide smoking restrictions in place. That's two-thirds of the country.

Thirty Hoosier counties, about one-third of the state, have smoking bans. One of the most restrictive is in Allen County, where smoking is not allowed in bars.

In some, casinos are exempt from the bans. Already in Indiana some casinos offer smoke-free areas, like French Lick, though you have to walk through the smoke-filled casino to get to the smoke-free area. (By the way, anyone who has accessed the French Lick casino through the hotel can tell you that you know you are nearing the casino by the strength of the smell of the smoke.)

Others complain that the neighborhood tavern will be run out of business. Again, other states have found ways around that either by allowing smoking in places where minors are not allowed or by allowing exemptions to private clubs. So, through a loophole, the neighborhood pub becomes a private club.

There are compromises out there for those who would prefer to maintain a smoking environment while allowing a majority of the public spaces to remain smoke free.

We urge our local legislators to poll their constituents on this important issue to see just where the people stand and then cast votes that reflect the people's wishes, not those of lobbyists.

The licensed beverage and casino associations have strong voices in Indianapolis. We don't believe, though, that their wishes reflect that of the majority of Hoosiers.