

Calabasas: Smart Move or Violation of Our Rights as Citizens?

On March 17, 2006, the city of Calabasas, California put into effect a ban on all public smoking, whether indoors or outdoors. The mayor of Calabasas, Barry Groveman, who is also an avid anti-tobacco activist and co-wrote Proposition 65 in 1986, came up with the "Comprehensive Secondhand Smoke Control Ordinance". The ordinance prohibits smoking in all public places, including restaurants, hotels, parks, bars, and even sidewalks. The ordinance also prohibits smoking in cars; if the windows are open and there could possibly be people outside of the car who could be harmed by the secondhand smoke. The city hopes that this ordinance will prompt a designation of segregated locations where smokers can enjoy a cigarette in public, but not harm non-smokers, passers-by, and children. A fine will be assessed to those who do not follow all guidelines of the ordinance. I believe that this ordinance strictly infringes upon our rights as US citizens, and I also believe that if the government keeps trying to take control over its citizens' lifestyles, our rights, as written in the Bill of Rights, will be violated.

Whether I was a smoker or a non-smoker, it is difficult to be objective on a subject like this. However, I am a human rights supporter and the thought of a government ban on individual choice of lifestyle is shocking. The way that an individual lives their life should not be controlled by the government unless that lifestyle infringes upon others' rights. Activists will argue that smoking infringes on others' rights to be healthy, but if that were the case, the rights of every person in the world would have been violated due the large amounts of air pollution being released by production plants and cars. It is unfair to say that secondhand cigarette

smoke is the cause of lung cancer for so many when cars emit carbon dioxide and deadly carbon monoxide twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Many studies have shown over the years that secondhand smoke and smoking itself were the leading cause of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases, but how is one to be sure that these studies were conducted and reported accurately? A study conducted in the 1980's in Japan concluded that the nonsmoking wives of smokers had a 40% more chance of getting lung cancer than the nonsmoking wives of nonsmokers. However, in a study conducted in 1991 by the Transportation Department of tobacco smoke aboard airlines concluded that a nonsmoking passenger sitting adjacent to the smoking section would have to "fly 266 trips from New York to Tokyo-about 7,500 hours in flight-to be exposed to the nicotine equivalent of one cigarette". Unfortunately, it is impossible to say that either of these studies is accurate; therefore one cannot conclude whether cigarette smoke is truly the main cause of lung cancer. As a US citizen, I believe that everyone should have the right to live the lifestyle they want. If a person is smoking and I do not want to inhale the secondhand smoke, I can simply walk away or kindly ask the smoker to move, which is a right that every citizen possesses. Instead of making a law against public smoking, the government should make a law against governing its citizens' lives.

The rights of the smoking citizens in Calabasas, California were violated on March 17, 2006 and many other cities are beginning to take notice of this and are trying to put bans on public smoking in other cities as well. The claim of a healthier environment for children and non-smokers by non-smoking activists is an unfounded claim that violated the rights of smoking citizens. In order to prevent this ban from becoming widespread, we need to inform the public of the real reasons people are dying of lung cancer: pollution to the environment by

automobiles and production plants around the world, which produce thousands of tons of air pollution while a cigarette smoke may only produce a millionth of that much.