

## Essay

California often leads the country on environmental causes. This reputation has resulted in numerous “tree hugger” jokes over the years. It is no laughing matter, though, when these environmental activists seek to take away the rights of their fellow citizens.

The city council of Calabasas, California has done exactly that with its public smoking ban. The broad smoking ban infringes on the rights of smokers who wish to enjoy a legal product, and it infringes on the rights of business owners by requiring them to become the enforcers of the unjust law. Moreover, it’s clear from the city council’s justification of the law that their basis is simply a bias against smokers.

According to the Calabasas city attorney, “the California Air Resources Board, which is the agency which regulates air quality in California, has adopted a regulation to treat secondhand smoke as a toxic pollutant of the air, like the kinds of things that come out of petroleum smoke stacks and out of the tailpipes of cars.” Since Calabasas did not ban cars within the city limits, one can only surmise that the council members are only against certain kinds of “toxic pollutants,” namely cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products.

This anti-tobacco bias among environmental activists is even obvious from the California Air Resources Board conclusions that provided the foundation for the Calabasas smoking ban. It is highly suspicious that the CARB could make such sweeping claims when the comprehensive

study on secondhand smoke by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2006 makes clear that there is no evidence that brief, transient exposure to secondhand smoke has any effect on an individual's chance of developing heart disease, lung cancer, or a broad range of other diseases.

The citizens of Calabasas can think for themselves and take personal responsibility for their own actions. They don't need an activist city council to impose its will on them. Certainly, it is important for Calabasas smokers to exercise common courtesy when enjoying a cigarette, cigar or pipe near others who are impacted by the smoke, but a friendly community campaign to remind smokers of this responsibility would likely have the same effect as the ban without trampling on citizens' rights. If the Calabasas city council truly aims to promote health and safety, it could develop effective and affordable programs for smokers who are trying to quit, or provide education on the adverse health effects of the fast food, sodas and junk food that are served throughout the community, including its own public high school.

As the wise political commentator of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, H.L. Mencken, put it, "the urge to save humanity is almost always only a false-face for the urge to rule it." Calabasas city council activists (and their friends in the anti-tobacco crowd) who claim to seek protection for citizens from secondhand smoke are selfishly and blatantly imposing their own will, based on a bias against tobacco products and consumers, upon their fellow citizens. This is an absolute violation of the principles of freedom that serve as the foundation of our nation.