

Recent attempts to restrict smoking have invaded the rights of American citizens. Anti-smoking campaigns are destroying an American tradition as old as our country without concrete proof and questionable reports of death caused by secondhand smoke. Further, there is minimal attempt to mediate with innovative solutions. A country that strives on its pride of being a "free country" continues to lash away at its own freedoms.

Bans such as those in Calabasas, California negatively impact state sales tax revenue, local tobacconists, bars, and restaurants. There is an even wider reach affecting the thousands of workers in third world countries such as Nicaragua, Honduras, and the Dominican. Before considering the elimination of tobacco, the seventh largest cash crop in the nation, anti-tobacconists should reflect upon the negative consequences of eradicating the tobacco industry. It is estimated that 681,353 persons were employed in America in 1993 by producing and delivering tobacco's profitable cash crop (Tobacco Institute, 1995; 3-5). Smoking bans put thousands out of business.

Not only does the anti-tobacco debate torment the economy, but also a tradition. Mark Twain, a famous American admired by many, noted that, "If I cannot smoke in heaven, then I shall not go." Removing camaraderie that comes with friends sharing a cigar, along with enjoying the taste and relaxation eliminates a historical tradition. As a result of the Calabasas ban, the next headline might be a policeman issuing a \$500 ticket to a private homeowner enjoying a cigar in the privacy of his own backyard.

Historically, America is characterized by trends of outrageous persecution, unjust actions, and atrocious laws. What were they thinking accusing women with cats as familiars of Satan? Why couldn't women vote? Were people sane when they imported Africans as slaves? Did people forget American culture as they enacted prohibition? What's next? No Smoking? If Americans continue to allow extremists to stomp over their rights, the county may expect future banning of cheeseburgers, driving, tanning and even plastic water bottles!

The Surgeon General says, "There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke." But hasn't everyone been exposed to secondhand smoke? Whether standing in front of your backyard grill, or behind a bus spewing black smoke, everyone is exposed to toxins on a daily basis. Is everyone dying? In reality, there are acceptable levels of toxins in air, water and food. It is not feasible to create 100% toxin free environment. The surgeon general, the laws, the bans... it's all gone too far. There are risks everyday, but we as individuals make choices by weighing the risks versus rewards.

In Calabasas, and all across America, citizens need to work for a more reasonable solution allowing business owners to determine their destiny. There could be a system of smoking and non-smoking bars that in turn satisfies smoking and non-smoking employees. Also, displacement ventilation is a new technological advancement that can eliminate up to 90% of secondhand smoke levels. These types of solutions scratch the surface of endless moderate solutions. Americans are never satisfied in a black or white situation. Variety and choice is key to an enjoyable and free life. Therefore, toleration, compromise, and moderation are pertinent to reach a consensus.