

Letters to the editor

Shame on Hannegan and let's reduce our smoking rates

The pro-con columns on smoke free policies in the most recent Vital Voice spark three responses in me:

1) I'd like to applaud Chip Schloss for protecting the air we share. The employees and customers of the Atomic Cowboy are healthier due to the bar and restaurant's smoke free policy. And it makes good business sense too; there's less need for cleaning and furniture repairs, fewer sick days for staff, and less replacement of electronic equipment like televisions in a smoke free environment....Not to mention how attractive a smoke free atmosphere is to the 77% of Missourians who do not smoke.

2) I'd like to offer a big "Shame on you, sir!" to Bill Hannegan. Peer-reviewed research conducted under rigorous scientific protocols clearly demonstrates that secondhand smoke is a public health hazard. We wouldn't go to a restaurant where the owner says "it's my choice whether I store my hamburger at a safe temperature or not; the state should just butt out with all these rules." Employees and patrons alike must be protected from breathing air full of toxic and carcinogenic chemicals, just as we ask for safe and sanitary conditions for food and drink.

3) Finally I'd like to appeal to my beloved LGBT community - We have to take the dangers of tobacco addiction and secondhand smoke seriously and become advocates to change our group norms.

About three out of five LGBT youth smoke, and this will have a devastating effect in terms of premature deaths due to tobacco-related disease (as is our community's past and current history too). As people who suffer from oppression, it is easy to find ourselves self-medicating with addictive substances, but this only leads to sickness and early death. Let's demand that Big Tobacco stop their devious marketing to our community, and let's work together to reduce our smoking rate.

*Jeanette Maga Oxford
 State Representative - 59th Missouri
 House District*

LGBT smoking rates up to 200% higher

Dear Editor:

As many communities near St. Louis begin to adopt smoke-free policies, it's natural that we begin to discuss the issue in the LGBT community of St. Louis. The local media coverage has been largely about economics and the impact on bars and clubs. Too often, in the smoke-free debate, the health of workers is overlooked. Everyone has the right to work in a safe and healthy environment. People should not have to choose between a job and their health. What has not been covered in the media is the health disparities in the LGBT community because of tobacco and that the LGBT community is a publicity target for the tobacco industry.

With 4,000 chemicals, and 60 known carcinogens, secondhand smoke is dangerous to nonsmokers. Every major medical

and public health organization agrees that secondhand smoke is harmful. The scientific evidence is overwhelming. The United States Surgeon General stated in 2006 that "the debate is over and the science is clear — secondhand smoke causes death and disease in nonsmokers."

Bar and hospitality workers are among the most exposed and least protected from secondhand smoke and have a significantly greater risk of dying from lung cancer than the general population.

Health regulations are not new to the hospitality industry. Bars and restaurants already implement regulations that protect the health of customers and employees such as not serving rotten food, washing dishes at a certain temperature and not serving undercooked meat.

Some businesses—restaurant and bar owners—continue to complain that smoke-free policies will cost them business. Their concern is genuine, understandable and misplaced—some of that concern is fueled by misleading campaigns funded by tobacco companies and other interests. In location after location where smoke-free policies have been enacted, the only thing that has declined significantly is smoking rates.

LGBT adults and youth have roughly 40 percent to almost 200 percent higher smoking rates than the general population; and bartenders and cocktail servers in LGBT oriented nightclubs are disproportionately exposed to secondhand smoke. This problem is exacerbated by the tobacco industry's attempts to target our

communities by offering to fund events in return for free advertising and smoking environments. One of the best ways we can make it to create clear, smoke-free environments for all LGBT public and social events. Better yet, community, we can fight for smoke-free environments in all public places.

*Maribel Lynn Jones
 Executive Director, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center
 Metropolitan Washington*

Are you a paid shill?

Dear Editor:

I would like to ask Mr. Hannegan, you please disclose if you are receiving funds from the tobacco industry or one of its funded organizations?

Because the truth of the matter is tobacco companies have long ago figured out that they can appeal to consumers painting smoking as a "right" that they should protect at all costs. And they've hired local community activists to do the dirty work for them. Unfortunately, this is often very effective, we have disproportionately high smoking rates in those communities most heavily targeted by the tobacco industries.

Considering you think evidence presented by the Surgeon General and the Centers for Disease Control and the American Cancer Society is not valid, we would like to know if you are being paid by the tobacco industry. Because, we might just want to know if our advice on health and freedom is coming from the PR department of Phillip Morris.

*Marta Pennington
 Program Manager, National LGBT Tobacco Control Network*