

Forum Editorial: Smoking debate tiresome

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Last week's committee hearing on a bill to ban smoking in all hotel rooms and bars had the feel of a time warp. It was a bizarre demonstration of both ignorance and intransigence. It was a stage for slow learners to spew their nonsense about "freedom" and the hazards of french fries. It would have been a real laugh riot, but for the pain and suffering such thinking has delivered on hundreds of thousands of people.

One rural tavern owner said, "The bottom line is freedom. It's my tavern. I should decide who smokes there."

Well, maybe it is about freedom: the tavern owner's freedom to poison the air his patrons and employees breathe; the freedom to operate a place where toxins sicken and kill people; the freedom to make a buck no matter the consequences to others.

But for real stupidity, it's the french fry argument. A representative of a fraternal club said if people are worried about carcinogens or other health hazards, they shouldn't eat french fries, either. That might be true, but there is no such thing as a secondhand french fry. Fries do not float in the air at the local fast-food restaurant and drift into customers' mouths. No one we know holds down a restaurant patron and stuffs fries down his/her throat.

The arguments against a comprehensive statewide smoking and secondhand smoke ban were bogus a few years ago. Now, as most major cities in the state have gone smoke-free – and the science of smoke is unambiguous – the rants from smoking advocates are just plain silly. Pathetic, even.

Even more pathetic, however, is the willingness of legislators to buy into the freedom scam and french fry nonsense. They have to know better. They have to know that by their inaction they are tacitly approving activity that kills and sickens their constituents. Still, they have been unable to summon the courage to put the long-term health of all North Dakotans ahead of the profits of a handful of bars and clubs.