

# Editorial's Point Goes Up in Smoke

By CAROL RUSSELL Bismarck

Smoking bill goes too far? Huh? How very sad is the Bismarck Tribune editorial that SB1213 goes too far to ban smoking. Considering the solid and extensive science behind the health effects of secondhand smoke, I expected greater enlightenment from my newspaper. The arguments put forward are so dreary and old, the tobacco industry could have written them, and, in fact, they have in the past, but through their many fig leaves. As a former head of California's Tobacco Control Program, I heard those same arguments 15 years ago. Come on. Take "freedom of choice" for example. The Tribune says people can choose whether to enter a smoking bar or not; same for hotels. That's true of patrons, but what about the people who work there? Are you telling me it's OK to protect the health of restaurant employees and workers in other public places but not bar or lounge employees or hotel workers? What kind of morality is that? In 1993 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency declared secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen, the same as asbestos. This is serious stuff. But I'm not going to beat a dead horse by sounding off about the science of environmental tobacco smoke. It's out there for anyone who has an iota of intellectual curiosity. Even if you're not curious, you can't miss it. If protecting the public's health isn't reason enough - a shameful stance - consider business concerns. A big one is liability. What is the liability of an employer who knowingly and willfully allows employees to be exposed to toxic, carcinogenic fumes? In the August 2007 issue of the American Journal of Public Health, experts in public health law note that employers across the country are already being held accountable for this exposure. One must also remember that 80 percent of North Dakotans don't smoke.