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From the Monday, February 25, 2002 Northwest Arkansas Times

## An unwise approach: How not to ban restaurant smoking

TIMES EDITORIAL -

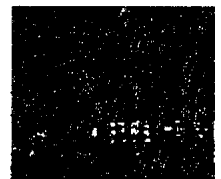
Mark us down with the majority: Much like 62 percent of Fayetteville residents polled in a recent survey, we don't like smoking in restaurants, either. But a city ordinance banning restaurant smoking is the wrong legislative avenue to take -- at least in Fayetteville's case.

It looks like there is little support for such a measure on the Fayetteville City Council anyway. Three council members are smokers, and have raised predictable objections to a ban. Another owns a bar, two others oppose the idea on conservative ideological grounds, and still others are just plumb scared to even approach the idea in a town where hospitality and entertainment are among the most lucrative industries.

We can understand and sympathize with the Northwest Arkansas Tobacco-Free Coalition and its efforts to reduce smoke inhalation for the patrons and, most importantly, the employees of restaurants. But we still have reservations about tackling restaurant smoking from simply a local perspective. Too many of the concerns brought up during discussion of a statewide ban -- which were at that time immaterial -- are given more weight when discussion turns to a city smoking ordinance.

Throughout Gov. Mike Huckabee's often strange contemplation of the state Board of Health's decision to ban restaurant smoking, we argued that the board was the duly recognized arm of the government to hand down health and safety regulations to protect the welfare of Arkansans. When Huckabee tried to dodge his responsibility and obligation to sign the health regulation by suggesting the matter go before the legislature or a statewide referendum, we ridiculed the idea because matters of health should be objective decisions based on scientific review, not political ones based on the whims of the majority.

In that vein, we still feel a city ordinance is the wrong way to legislate this very important health issue. The city's decision, whatever it turns out to be, would be based mostly on preference,



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not health, and would raise other questions: During the health board debate, many illegitimately argued a smoking ban would give restaurants a competitive disadvantage by not allowing patrons to light up, which made little sense considering the ban would have been issued across the board and applied to everyone. With a local ordinance, such a concern is made legitimate: Banning smoking in Fayetteville restaurants would put those establishments on an uneven field with other restaurants in the region.

Fayetteville is the entertainment and hospitality capital of Northwest Arkansas, and shouldn't do anything to jeopardize that position within the region. While we're certain the supporters of such a ban view Fayetteville's progressive community as a testing ground for success in other Arkansas cities, we would encourage them to focus their efforts on reviving a statewide ban.

#### How 'bout them Dogs?

Our congratulations to the Fayetteville High School basketball Bulldogs on a perfect conference season, And to finish it out with a rout of Springdale, no less!

The Purple Dogs finished undefeated in the AAAAA-West conference, which is no small feat. In fact, it hasn't been done since the conference expanded to its current format many years back.

To be honest, we were a little worried Springdale might achieve its goal of spoiling Fayetteville's near-perfect season last Tuesday. As one of our former sports writers once penned here, in the Fayetteville-Springdale game, the best team doesn't always win -- Springdale does.

But the Fayetteville Bulldogs kept their cool and warded off a near tie game toward the half to wallop the Red Dogs 82-58.

Best of luck to the home team as they take to the state championships Tuesday. Whatever happens, they have already made their community proud.

*From the NWA Tim*

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