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New outdoor smoking ban is just 'social engineering' by extremists

Such laws are not about public health anymore, charge Libertarians

WASHINGTON, DC — A decision by a town in Maryland to ban smoking outdoors shows that anti-cigarette laws are no longer about protecting public health, they are about "social engineering," the Libertarian Party charged today.

"This new law proves that anti-smoking extremists don't really care about the potential dangers of secondhand smoke to bystanders — they simply want to use the power of government to force other people to give up their bad habits," said Steve Dasbach, the party's national director.

"This law, and others like it around the country, also show that the damage to liberty and tolerance caused by tobacco prohibitionists has become far greater than any damage to public health caused by cigarettes."

Last week, the village of Friendship Heights, Maryland, passed what has been called "the nation's strictest tobacco ban" — prohibiting smoking outdoors on government property like streets, sidewalks, and parks. Violators face a \$100 fine.

Supporters said the law is a "public health issue," but since the dangers of secondhand smoke outside are so infinitesimal, and have never been proven by science, that can't be the real reason, said Dasbach.

"This law is social engineering, plain and simple," he said. "It represents a small group of tobacco prohibitionists who don't like smoking. So, they are using the coercive power of government to prohibit people from engaging in a habit of which they don't approve."

Unfortunately, the Friendship Heights law is just one of an increasingly zany series of proposed anti-smoking regulations around the USA, said Dasbach. Also on the list:

■ In San Francisco, a proposed law will treat tobacco like New York treats pornography: It would prohibit any store from devoting more than 25% of its floor space to tobacco products. Existing tobacco shops would have to close within two years.

■ In Superior, Colorado, smoking has been outlawed on the outdoor patios of restaurants, according to the Guest Choice Network.

■ In Coral Springs, Florida, a proposed law would ban smoking in the city's 46 parks.

"What do these laws have in common?" asked Dasbach. "They no longer are attempting to protect the health of non-smokers, but are an effort to criminalize smoking, change the social norms, and force people to give up a habit that anti-cigarette extremists don't like."