

## **ON CONSERVATISM & BULLYING**

A recent column in this paper (“Don’t surrender to Liberals’ Agenda”, June 10) suggested that the Anchorage smoke free workplace ordinance that will take effect July 1, was a form of “bullying.” As a sponsor of the ordinance, this prompted my thinking about the nature of both conservatism and “bullying.”

First, I asked: What behavior constitutes “bullying”? For me, “bullies” are those who don’t respect others’ and who, for no good reason, impose themselves on others in an intentionally harmful way.

The author of the recent “bullying” column simply doesn’t understand the term “bullying”. My ordinance and the subsequent approval by the 72% of the voters who supported the ordinance, is not “bullying”. The simple truth is that no one has a right to blow cigarette smoke in another person’s face. Not in a bar. Not in a bingo hall. Not anywhere. Everyone has the right to breathe clean air in the work place. By requiring those who wish to smoke to go outside, we struck a blow against “bullying”.

What does the smoke free ordinance do? The ordinance protects the right of employees, non-smokers and children in small day care facilities to breathe clean air. The ordinance wasn’t passed to harm anyone. There are both health and economic facts which supported passage of the ordinance. As was well documented in numerous peer-reviewed studies, “smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse economic impact on the hospitality industry.” (Surgeon General’s Report).

Evolving knowledge about secondhand smoke made the need for incremental change clear. In 1964, smoking was first recognized to cause cancer. In 1986, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded secondhand smoke caused lung cancer and respiratory illness. In 1999, the National Institutes of Health reported secondhand smoke caused tens of thousands of deaths annually. Anchorage’s ordinances regulating smoking also changed over these years.

In 2006, shortly before the Assembly approved the ordinance, the Surgeon General concluded approximately 50,000 non-smokers die annually from secondhand smoke. As the Surgeon General said: “The debate is over. The science is clear. Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults.”

Given these facts, is protecting employees and non-smokers in the work place and children in small day care facilities “liberalism” or “bullying”? I think not.

I also asked: “What is conservatism?” For me, conservatism is based on a belief in traditional values and the wisdom of experience. Conservatism is less a political doctrine (pro-this or anti-that), than a habit of mind. Conservatives respect well-established, thought-out principals of government.

Edmund Burke, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish politician, argued reliance on “metaphysical abstractions” - his term for bright ideas of his day - often masked preferences of one group or another without reflecting the refined, collective wisdom and experience of many generations. Often, he argued, decisions made for the sake of some untested theory run afoul of the law of unintended consequences.

Conservatism favors incremental change. Conservatism opposes radical change. Judging what change is appropriate, of course, can be difficult. For me, making such a judgment requires knowledge of the society we live in and the application of one’s experience and wisdom to the matter at hand. I’ve lived and worked in Anchorage for 60 years and been engaged in public life for over 20 years. I know a lot about our City. I always try to apply my knowledge and experience in order to make sound decisions that will benefit Anchorage residents.

In my judgment, the smoke free workplace ordinance was but one additional step in an incremental process responding to well-documented need for change. At the same time, to provide businesses time to prepare, the ordinance delayed implementation a year. This, to me, is not “bullying”, but rather, is the conservative way.