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State smoking ban passes second hurdle

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By **KATE R. HOULIHAN** Staff Writer

A statewide smoking ban bill passed the state House on Tuesday afternoon - and Naperville leaders were overjoyed, while also sighing with relief.

There were 73 votes in favor, 42 against and one present for the Smoke Free Illinois Act, which must be signed by Gov. Rod Blagojevich before it becomes law. The bill passed through the Senate on March 29.

Last week the governor's press secretary, Abby Ottenhoff, told The Sun that Blagojevich would likely approve the measure, which would stamp out smoking in all indoor public places, including bars, restaurants and places of employment.

On April 18 the Naperville City Council passed its own ban that mirrored the language of the state Senate's bill and worked hard to lobby legislators in Springfield the following week to make Illinois smoke-free.

"This levels the playing field and we are proud they've chosen to do it statewide because it takes the pressure off of us," Mayor George Pradel said.

Advocates celebrate

Smoke Free Naperville President Tony Andrews had a very special phone call to make as soon as he heard the news.

"I just got off the phone with my mom and dad because I thank them for instilling in me these types of notions that health is important and secondhand smoke is a terrible thing," Andrews said. "So I called them to point out to them that we did it. We did it in Naperville and at the state level, too. It's fabulous."

Calling it good news for everybody, Councilman Grant Wehrli said he was just glad everyone would be able to receive the health benefits of a smoke-free environment.

"In 10 years people are going to look back and go, 'You used to be able to smoke anywhere you wanted?'" he said.

Both Reps. Joe Dunn, R-Naperville, and Rep. Jim Meyer, R-Naperville, voted in favor. While both men would have preferred changes to a few portions of the bill, the overall goal took precedence.

From city to state

Councilman-elect Bob Fieseler said such a move confirms the wisdom of Naperville moving forward with passing a ban. Fieseler, who ran on a platform of being in favor of a smoking ban but also in favor of moving slowly after a citywide ban was initially tabled in March, said he has been happily proven wrong in this case.

"I'm happy, because it will essentially offload that whole issue from Naperville locally and we wouldn't have that angst of whether we're undercutting and removing this level playing field," he said.

If signed into law the ban would go into effect Jan. 1. A home-rule community could feasibly pass a smoke-free ordinance of its own as long as it was no less strict than the state's law.

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