

Analyzing an Editorial

Media Investigations

Editorials are not just written by journalists. The Op-ed (“Opposite Editorial”) pages of newspapers often include editorials by experts in a field or politicians writing about issues of interest to them. Commentaries by ordinary citizens also sometimes appear in this section. Any citizen can write an editorial through the Letters to the Editor section. Most newspapers have rules to guide which letters they choose to publish, but the criteria for reading letters to the editor is similar to reading editorials. The following two letters to the editor offer citizens’ opinions about the economic effects of a proposed public smoking ban. Compare the letters below and answer the questions that follow.

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

The public smoking ban being considered for our city would be an economic disaster for restaurants and clubs. I own a restaurant that would be affected by the ban. I have seen the effects that similar bans have had on small businesses and am worried about the future of my business.

Last year the city of Evansville in our neighboring state passed a ban on smoking in all public places, including restaurants and nightclubs. Anti-smoking supporters hoped to use this ban to get similar county and statewide bans passed. That never happened. Surrounded by other cities without such bans, smokers have taken their business elsewhere. As a result, since the ban went into effect, restaurants and clubs in Evansville have experienced a 15% decline in income. Some 20 such establishments have closed. I fear similar results if such a ban passes here. Please vote “no” on the smoking ban. Our economy depends on it.

*Terry Smith,
Owner, Smitty’s Steakhouse*

To the Editor:

In response to those business owners concerned about the effects of the proposed smoking ban: Think of it as an opportunity to gain new clients. I suffer from asthma. Currently I have to avoid many establishments that allow smoking because it makes it hard for me to breathe (even so-called “smoking sections” do not really work to separate the air). If places like Smitty’s Steakhouse were smoke-free, I would gladly spend my money there. It’s like changing the menu you offer. If a popular hamburger joint switches to become a popular seafood restaurant, it may attract a different crowd of people but will still be popular if the food is good. And it will still be profitable. In fact, it may attract more clients who are looking for a fun, but healthier dining experience. The claims of economic downturn mentioned by smoking ban opponents are not persuasive. There is no evidence linking the ban to smaller incomes or even business closures, which are commonplace in the restaurant business of a large city. Vote “yes” for the ban and get ready to open the doors to the non-smokers among us.

Kerry Littlefield, West Plaza

1. How do these letters differ in the arguments they present? Which do you find more persuasive?

2. Describe each writer. What do you think each hoped to accomplish by sharing his or her opinion through a published letter?

3. What is your point of view on smoking bans? Write your own letter to the editor on this topic.