

Assembly Votes 5-1 to Move Smoking Question Forward

Wednesday, 03 July 2013

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The Kodiak Island Borough Assembly voted 5-1 last night to introduce an ordinance to allow the voters to decide if smoking should be allowed in bars, restaurants and other businesses in Kodiak.

There were a number of residents voicing their opinions on the issue, largely against a smoking ban.

Janet Wente phoned in to the meeting and pointed out that restaurants and bars aren't the only businesses in town.

"It seems to me it goes far beyond businesses that like restaurants and bars, like any business. I own a business and nobody smokes in there just because of the nature of the business. But it seems to me even there's lots of fishing vessels that are businesses," Wente said. "So is this going to extend to them? Are skippers and owners are going to be required not to allow their crewmen to smoke? I know that smoking is dangerous. I don't smoke. I don't want second-hand smoke, but there are few places that it really does happens as part of our culture. And this effort, I think, on the eve of our Independence Day, limits our independence, limits our freedom and limits our self-determination."

George Gatter, owner of Tony's Bar, pointed out that only adults are allowed in bars.

"Laws are supposed to be in place to protect the people who cannot protect themselves. And if people choose to be where there is second-hand smoke, then that is their ... I believe that's their choice and I also believe it is the owners choice of the establishment," Gatter said. "We have a lot of businesses downtown some smoking, some non-smoking, so there is a mixed variety of places to attend to enjoy a beverage and socialize with the people in the community."

He added that said prospective employees are made aware of the smoking environment before they are hired.

There was about 20 minutes of public comments at the beginning of the meeting, but we can't share more because of technical difficulties in the audio signal from the borough building.

Nearer the end of the meeting, assembly members were given the opportunity to comment on the introduction. Aaron Griffin explained some of his reasons behind introducing the idea last month.

"I want to point out that this ordinance is for approval by the voters, not the seven of us sitting at here at this table. And that it's really an effort to address many of the public comments I've received regarding this issue," Griffin said. "But mainly, this is a worker-safety issue. The effects of second-hand smoke are clinically proven, they've been proven time and time again. These are not in question. And what this comes down to as a rights issue is questionable when we're talking about people's lives."

The introduction of the ordinance was successful on a vote of 5-to-1, with Assemblywoman Louise Stutes dissenting. The measure will come back before the assembly on July 18th for a public hearing and a final vote. If it is passed then, the question will be put to the citizens of the Kodiak Island Borough to vote on and decide.