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Texas Statewide Smoking Ban

Senator Robert Duncan

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I want to talk a little bit this week about the legislation that proposes a statewide smoking ban in public places, including restaurants and bars. As many of you will recall, in your communities, you may have had to take this vote on a local basis. The Legislature this session, as it did last session, will consider a statewide smoking ban.

The proponents of the legislation are concerned from a health standpoint in regard to the health and safety of those who are forced to inhale secondhand smoke when they enter restaurants, bars and other public places. In recent years, we have seen trends- on a voluntary basis, many businesses are banning smoking in their particular establishments.

To have some uniformity in the way we address the smoking ordinances, the proponents of the Legislation have proposed to ban smoking in all public places. I think this is an important issue for Texans to consider. One of the things that has my interest is the enormous cost to all of us for treating diseases that are related to cigarette smoking. I'm not talking about Medicaid and Medicare, but I'm also talking about the increase in insurance premiums that we all pay to subsidize the healthcare for those who have smoking related illnesses.

States around the country are looking at this very closely to understand the overarching public issue of whether or not we need to try to discourage smoking among our population. A statewide smoking ban would achieve that policy goal.

There are problems with this type of legislation, and there are those who are very strongly opposed to it. Last session I was not convinced this was the proper direction for Texas to go. Currently, I am considering this legislation very closely. I would be interested to hear your comments and the direction you wish this to take.

When this type of legislation has been considered before, we have typically received overwhelming encouragement for support of this legislation. We have also received some very strong objection.

We would be interested in hearing your opinions. You can reach us most efficiently through our Web site address, www.senatorduncan.com