

A 75 Percent “Smoke Free Zone” in Casinos...Only in New Jersey
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2/15/2007

It just doesn't make sense. Last week an ordinance was passed in the Atlantic City municipal council that would bar smoking on only 75 percent of any casino floor and leave the remaining 25 percent as designated smoking areas. The casinos are required to set up this bizarre system by April 15. It is being called a “compromise,” but I call it a cop-out.

Last year, New Jersey state officials finally came to their senses and banned smoking in virtually all public places, but casinos were left out of the deal. Again, it was called a “compromise.” The municipal council in Atlantic City was under pressure from public health groups and casino workers to do something. Legislation has been proposed in Trenton that would no longer exempt casinos from New Jersey's new smoking ban in public places. On February 7 the Atlantic City council voted 6-3 to pass this wacky 75/25 percent ordinance. Think about it. The council is saying that virtually every other worker in every conceivable industry has the right to work in a healthy, smoke-free environment; but if you work in a casino, you get the shaft.

Customers in the casinos will have to put up with smoking in one-quarter of the casino floors. Supposedly some “ventilation system” is to be put in place that would keep cancer-causing second-hand smoke away from the three-quarters of the casino floor designated as non-smoking. Personally, I've never seen a ventilation system in a restaurant or other place that keeps smoke away from so-called “smoke free” areas. That's what happens with smoke. It doesn't respect barriers. It just goes where it goes, into people's lungs that have no desire to be around it.

The casino industry put heavy pressure on the Atlantic City council to reach this deal. I respect the casino industry and the jobs and revenue it creates. I also appreciate that we have legalized gambling in New Jersey because I have a thing for black jack. The casino industry argued that up to 20 percent of its revenue and potentially 3,400 jobs could be lost if 25 percent of the casino floor didn't remain a smoker's paradise. Assume the argument is true, and I have no reason to believe that it's not; but I'm just wondering at what point did we decide that commerce trumps (excuse the pun) public health? It makes no sense.

You can't spit on the floor in a casino or they will throw you out—same thing is true in a restaurant. You can't take gum out of your mouth and stick it on the poker table next to your drink in a casino. It's disgusting. It's dirty. In fact, did you ever notice all those signs in restaurant bathrooms reminding employees to wash their hands before returning to work? What do you think that's

