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OPINION

A10 NEW HAVEN REGISTER

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EDITORIALS

Milford smoking ban

We are usually leery of incursions by government into our private lives, such as the requirement in the Democrats' health legislation that chain restaurants post calorie counts for the food they serve. The idea of government do-gooders looking over our shoulder while we eat is galling.

However, Milford made the right call in banning smoking from its 465 units of public housing. The ban in the living units was enacted because of concerns about the health effects of secondhand tobacco smoke, accidental fires and the extra costs of maintenance. Tenants can smoke outside.

Concerns about secondhand smoke may have been a main factor in the authority's vote. Two other factors supported the ban. The tenants are not owners, but renters. They have to live by rules that do not apply to homeowners. Second, it takes twice the money to refurbish a unit after a smoker moves out, according to Hilary H. Holowink, chairwoman of Milford Redevelopment and Housing Partnership. Just as some landlords ban pets, there is a sound economic reason for Milford to ban smoking in its public housing.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Smoking prohibition is a token of love

The no-smoking policy of the Milford Housing Authority could be a way of saying "we care about you and we love you."

Years ago, United Illuminating Co. put up an outdoor shed for employees when smoking was banned in its building. I suggested the money instead go to stop-smoking therapy for those who wanted it, showing its employees it cared about them rather than saying: If you want to kill yourself, do it in the outdoor shed.

Because of their smoking, a couple had a cat die of lung cancer and their other cats develop breathing problems. They wrote a letter to Cat Fancy magazine that finished: "Doug and I now smoke in the yard. We love our cats more than the convenience of smoking indoors. We are not killing our cats any-

more, we hope you are not killing yours." So, people should have the right to kill themselves as long as they protect their pets.

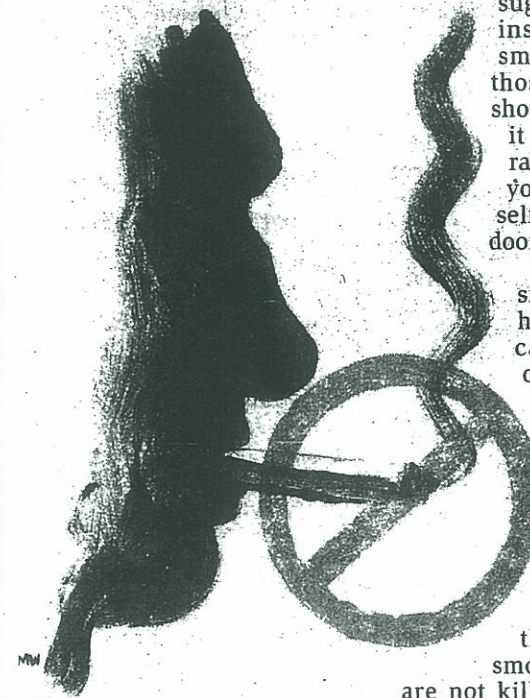
Children's health isn't considered as important as pets' health, either.

Why should those who do not smoke or behave in a self-destructive manner have to pay for the medical care of those who do?

Three cheers for the housing authority.

If it wants to help even more, make sure residents are allowed to own a pet and have plants in their apartments. Studies reveal that nursing home residents who were given plants to care for lived five years longer than those who had their room decorated with a plant for which they were not responsible. In an Australian study, the mortality rate 12 months after a heart attack in homes with a dog was 5 percent, while in homes without a dog it was 26 percent.

Bernie Siegel, M.D.
Woodbridge



Smoking ban in public housing is right move

By Editorial Board

Posted September 22, 2010 at 5:55 a.m., updated September 22, 2010 at 6 a.m.

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CORPUS CHRISTI — The Corpus Christi Housing Authority has made a principled decision to uphold the rights of nonsmokers, including small children, not to breathe secondhand smoke. The Housing Authority decided to ban smoking from public housing units starting Oct. 1. If only it were sooner.

Last year the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issued a memo to housing authorities encouraging smoke bans and pointing out health-related concerns as justification. Among those are that secondhand smoke can migrate between densely packed housing units. The memo points out some now-well-known-by-everybody consequences of secondhand smoke — respiratory illnesses, heart disease and cancer. And the memo points out that most people in public housing are older than 61 and younger than 18, populations considered especially vulnerable to the hazards of secondhand smoke.

HUD shouldn't have to work that hard to make its case. HUD, being HUD and therefore the federal government, may have an image problem, especially these days, and especially when the opposing force is the Madison Avenue play known as smokers' rights, embodied by the ruggedly handsome Marlboro Man. But if there exists a public in need of convincing — and we don't think one does — then HUD and the Housing Authority can brand themselves the champions of nonsmokers, taxpayers and the poor.

A smoker imposes upon a nonsmoker's rights any time the smoker smokes where the nonsmoker breathes. Why should the nonsmoking residents of public housing endure this health hazard in addition to poverty?

Taxpayers, meanwhile, have a right not to incur any added expense caused by smoking within public housing provided by their tax dollars. Not to allow smoking inside the taxpayer-provided confines of public housing falls somewhat short of jackbooted thuggery. Besides, isn't the Marlboro Man the boot-wearer in this scenario? Home-owning, property taxpaying parents can smoke all they want inside their homes in the presence of their newborns, though we'd be curious how Big Tobacco would spin that into something attractive.

Smokers who live in public housing have a right to complain about the new rule. Unlike smokers' rights, freedom of speech is a constitutional guarantee. Likewise, it's our right to wonder aloud how anyone in public housing can afford cigarettes.

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