

# Yeah, I am biased against tobacco products



## Out of the frying pan

Brodie Farquhar / Reporter

I'm an orphan.

So's my wife.

All our parents are dead. When Mother's Day and Father's Day roll around, Sharon and I get calls and cards and hugs from our kids, but we don't have any parents we can call.

I blame tobacco for two strokes and attendant complications, one massive heart attack and lung cancer from second-hand smoke.

As a reporter, I've followed the tobacco "controversy" for decades, reading articles about "respected" scientists casting doubt as to whether tobacco is all that bad, or watching televised congressional testimony as tobacco company presidents said tobacco wasn't addictive.

I've interviewed prisoners, patients and skid-row bums who've been burdened by the "three monkeys" on their back – addiction to alcohol, heroin and tobacco. All agreed that kicking the tobacco habit is the hardest. Scientists have identified nicotine as one of the most addictive substances known to man.

Talk radio blather that tobacco use is a matter of personal responsibility is specious nonsense. Free will is important, but it is severely handicapped when you're in the grip of addiction like tobacco.

I've followed the money in campaign donations from tobacco companies to politicians at all levels of political life – presidential campaigns, congressional races, state legislatures and right into county courthouses and city councils. That money is deeply and corrosively corruptive, costing millions of lives and billions in health costs and lost productivity – all for continuing tobacco profits.

Any extended Wyoming families in Johnson County that haven't lost someone to tobacco-related diseases?

Anyone? Wyoming loses 700 adult lives every year due to tobacco.

So when I saw the issue of a smoke-free Buffalo come up at the Meet the Candidates forum, I paid attention; particularly when some candidates demonstrated that they've been exposed to "spin" from the tobacco industry.

Just as smoke-free laws have grown nationally, there's been a parallel growth in "spin" from tobacco companies, that smoke-free laws will hurt local businesses.

Bull.

Rigorous scientific and economic research all over the country shows that smoke-free laws do not hurt restaurant and bar patronage, employees, sales or profits. A 2006 report from the surgeon general concluded that "Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse economic impact on the hospitality industry."

In dozens of studies around the country, smoke-free laws have at worst, had zero negative impact on restaurants and bars, and in many cases, have had positive impacts. The website for Tobacco Free Kids has an excellent summary report with links to over 30 studies.

I know one Wyoming restaurant that was aggressively pro-smoking, until one of the owners started having respiratory problems directly linked to second-hand smoke. That bar/restaurant is smoke-free now, lost only a few smokers and gained even more non-smokers – a net gain. Owners and workers alike now breathe clean air at work.

Oh, and if anyone starts insisting that air ventilation/filtration will provide "balance" between smokers and non-smokers, again I cry "Bull!"

Tobacco companies promote ventilation because it is one of the few ways they can defeat smoke-free ordinances. Yet the consensus among scientists, engineers, public health officials and even the air filtration companies themselves, is that there is no ventilation system that can eliminate the death and disease caused by second-hand smoke.

There's self-serving spin from the tobacco companies and their allies, and then there's scientific facts. I'll go with the facts, thank you.

I guess that makes me biased.

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