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The Record: Support smoking ban

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GOVERNOR CHRISTIE wants legislators to butt out and let towns decide whether to ban smoking at public parks and beaches across New Jersey. The governor does not recognize the importance of taking a strong stance on this public-health issue.

The Republicans, who largely voted with their colleagues across the aisle to approve this measure, should remain committed to its benefits and override Christie's veto.

Christie said in his veto message that "local officials have long defined the policy course concerning smoking in public that is in the best interests of their constituents."

However, New Jersey decided in 2006 to ban smoking in several indoor locations, including restaurants, shopping malls and most workplaces. The bill extending that ban to public beaches and parks passed in June with a 64-7 vote in the Assembly and 30-3 in the Senate.

There certainly are areas that municipal governments should control, but this isn't a simple quality-of-life issue, such as how late a town wants to let businesses stay open. This is about protecting the health of individuals who want to enjoy a day in the park or at the beach without having to breathe in poison.

People are, of course, free to choose to smoke despite the harm it causes their bodies with lung cancer and other ailments. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths a year.

Legislation like the bill Christie vetoed is necessary because smokers don't only harm themselves. The smoke spreads and forces the people around them to inhale it as well.

According to the CDC, 2.5 million non-smokers have died from exposure to secondhand smoke since 1964. However, secondhand smoke exposure has decreased in recent years as states have implemented smoking bans.

Still, prohibiting smoking indoors hasn't worked to completely keep people free of secondhand smoke. Protecting the air at parks and beaches across the state

should be the next step.

An overwhelming majority of state leaders, both Democrats and Republicans, agreed with that when they approved the bill. Now is their chance to show they truly care about their constituents' well-being.

Since Christie took office, the Legislature hasn't been able to override any of his vetoes. It hasn't mattered if the votes were there to approve the bills initially. Republican legislators are afraid to go against the governor when it counts.

They were right to support this public health measure. Now is not the time for them to butt out.

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