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### Congress May Ban Smoking in All Federal Buildings

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 -- The next time you go down to the federal courthouse, you may have to put out your cigarette.

Rep. Jim Traficant, a congressman from Ohio, conducted the first in a series of hearings Tuesday on a bill he introduced that would ban smoking in all federally owned and leased office buildings, including congressional offices and the U.S. courts.

"The federal government has an obligation to provide a healthy workplace for its workers and all who use its facilities," said Traficant, chairman of the House public works subcommittee on public buildings and grounds.

Several recent developments support his call for a smoking ban, Traficant said. In a report last month, the federal Environmental Protection Agency said secondhand smoke is responsible for about 3,000 lung cancer deaths each year.

On Monday California Gov. Pete Wilson signed an executive order to prohibit smoking in state buildings, hospitals and prisons. Last week, McDonald's said it was testing a smoking ban in some of its restaurants.

"If Ronald McDonald can address this issue, certainly the Congress, which usually follows or gets out of the way, can lead on this issue," Traficant said.

The General Services Administration, which manages most of the federal government's real estate, now permits smoking only in designated areas of the 7,800 buildings it controls, said P. Gerald Thacker, GSA acting commissioner for public building service. One million employees work in those building, Thacker said.

The current policy, which usually allows smoking in limited areas, such as a special room or a section of a cafeteria, has been in effect since the mid-1980s, with individual agencies permitted to put more stringent policies of their own in place.

In most office buildings, 75 to 85 percent of the air is recirculated, Thacker said. "Tobacco smoke eventually circulates throughout the rest of the

building and exposes the non-smoker to the carcinogens," he said.

Bill Wordham, spokesman for the Tobacco Institute, said in an interview that if buildings are properly ventilated, allowing smoking in only designated areas should be acceptable to people on all sides of the debate.

"A ban on all smoking seems to be a very extreme position for the government to take," Wordham said. "The reasonable position would be to provide non-smoking areas or designated non-smoking offices," he said.

Diane Witiak, spokeswoman for the American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal employees union, said her group does not expect to take a position on Traficant's bill.

"In an ideal world we would like to be able to facilitate both types of employees" with properly ventilated areas set aside for smokers, she said. "We stress that any reduction of smoking ... should be accompanied by programs to help workers break the habit of smoking."

Three members of Congress, Reps. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Bill Goodling, R-Pa., and Tim Penny, D-Minn., early this month sent a letter to their colleagues, calling for support of their own effort to limit smoking in congressional office buildings. They also asked congressional staffs to complete a survey about how smoking should be limited.

Rob Herman, spokesman for Rep. Eric D. Fingerhut, D-Ohio, said his staff voted on three choices: ban smoking everywhere on Capitol Hill, allow smoking only in specified areas or impose no ban at all.

The staff, all non-smokers, split four to four between the proposal for a total ban and that for smoking in restricted areas only, Herman said. Fingerhut did not vote on the proposals.

One Senate staff member, who asked not to be identified by name, said she smokes one-and-a-half packs of cigarettes a day, but would welcome the proposed ban. "If I had to go outside, it would curtail my smoking," she said.

During the committee hearing, Rep. Bill Emerson, R-Mo., a frequent smoker, said he understands the concerns of those who support a smoking ban. "But, I do believe in my right to smoke," he said.

Traficant was quick to reassure him. "We're not anti-smoker, we're just anti-smoking in federal buildings."