

**House Industry, Business & Labor
Chairman – Representative Mike Lefor
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Testimony

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HB 1152

Good afternoon Chairman Lefor and members of the House Industry, Business and Labor Committee. My name is Shaun Sipma and I am a resident of Minot. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 1152.

It's been more than nine years since our City's only cigar-lounge closed stemming directly from the smoking ban passed by a statewide vote. The Great Plains Smoke Shop was owned by a retired Air Force veteran. The Great Plains Smoke Shop had one full time employee with several part time people employed. The Garage Lounge, that was connect to Great Plains, was also owned by the same Air Force Veteran and had approximately 5 part-time employees. Both businesses were small but generated a lot of revenue for a business of its size. Great Plains also hosted numerous fundraisers each year with benefits going to Wounded Warriors and the Mid-Dakota Chapter of the American Red Cross to name just a few. North Dakota Cigarfest also came to be as an annual event that brought as many as 250 people from around the region to the event.

The Garage Lounge being a beer bar was a niche business to put it plainly. Beer and Cigars. People who patronized the were there for exactly those reason. Those that didn't appreciate the atmosphere would simply choose to go somewhere else.

As both businesses closed, the Garage Lounge first shortly after the smoking ban followed by Great Plains Smoke shop about three years later

all of the sales of cigars have gone on-line. I know because that's where I buy mine. Cigars International.com, Cigar.com, Thompson Cigar.com, JR Cigars.com are just a few of the places where purchases are made. Based on cigar forums on-line on various social media platforms I can attest I am far from the only person that took my business elsewhere when "Buy Local" was regulated out of business.

I have no doubt the same testimony will arise about smoking concerns, health studies and more pitting Cigar Smoking as unhealthy, as a gateway to get younger people to start smoking or air pollution as we heard last legislative session when a similar bill was considered.

For me, this comes down to a simplistic point, cigar smokers are still smoking cigars. We are now in our garage or outbuilding during the winter or sitting on our desk or patio during the summer. The difference is our money is going out-of-state to online companies rather than being spent locally.

I agree that regulation to keep children away from smoking prudent and necessary. The pendulum of regulation though swung entirely too far. The issue of health and choice can be debated endlessly so I will leave that to your own understanding.

Thank you for your time and please consider a Do-Pass recommendation on House Bill 1152.

I'd be happy to stand for questions if you have them.