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Officials: Kenton, Campbell counties have votes to pass smoking ban; Boone doesn't

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ERLANGER - Two of Northern Kentucky's three counties have the votes to pass a ban on indoor smoking in public places, county officials said Tuesday.

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During their annual State of Northern Kentucky Address, Campbell Judge-executive Steve Penderly and Kenton Judge-executive Ralph Drees said three of the four members of their Fiscal Courts would vote in favor of the smoking ban.

"We have the votes, but we don't want to do it unless the other counties go along," Drees said.

But Boone Judge-executive Gary Moore said the votes aren't there in his county.

"I don't believe at this point that Boone County has the votes to pass this," he said. "In talking with the commissioners and taking a look at the economic climate, I don't think we're there today. It's a work in progress and as we move forward, we'll see how it goes. My personal vote will depend on the ordinance and how it's worded."

The ban has been a political issue in Northern Kentucky off and on since at least 2004, when Lexington became the first Kentucky city to enact an indoor smoking ban.

Moore called it "the hottest policy question that's out there these days."

The ban is being pushed by the American Cancer Society and other health advocates, but it's met opposition from the business community. And even county officials weren't on board at first, Penderly said.

"A lot of us started as anti's, and only after a couple years' persuasion, with a lot of information supplied, did we change our

minds," he said.

Each county would need to enact its own ordinance, but officials plan to enact an identical version in each county.

Several drafts have been proposed in recent years, but each has failed.

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A draft ordinance is again in the works, but officials have refused to make it public. Moore said the Boone County Attorney doesn't believe they are required to release the draft under the state's open records laws.

Few details about the draft are available, but Moore and Drees said officials are in talks with the Northern Kentucky Health Department on how to enforce the ban.

"We don't want to create a police state," Drees said.

Moore, Pendery and Drees agree the ban needs to be enacted across all three counties in order to succeed.

But Drees wouldn't rule out the possibility that Campbell and Kenton could move forward with a first reading without Boone. The ordinance would require at least two readings in each county before a vote is held.

"Maybe if we each did a reading and held up on the vote, maybe that'll help push Boone County," Drees said.

Grant Judge-executive Darrell Link said his county was invited to be part of the regional smoking ban when talks began, but declined.

Link, Drees, Moore and Pendery touched upon a variety of other issues at the annual event, including the economy's effect on county budgets, job creation and economic development, the possible consolidation of services such as emergency dispatch, and the need to reform the funding formula for dispatch.

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