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Administration Asks MPD to Enforce Smoking Ban in Taverns

Statement of Alderman Bob Donovan June 28, 2010

As if Milwaukee police officers aren't already up to their badges in calls for service for cruising, shots fired, armed robberies, and other possible serious crimes, starting July 5th they'll also be asked to make sure no one lights up a smoke inside taverns and nightclubs.

That's right – sources tell me the Barrett Administration is asking that our officers snuff out (and write tickets) for violations of the statewide smoking ban. Quite frankly, I find this directive absolutely insane, especially given the fact that our officers already don't respond to unverified burglar alarms, car break-ins, and a myriad of other quality of life ordinance violations.

But oh boy, let's make sure our officers are right there when some poor dude lights up in a corner of their corner tavern or a nightclub restroom.

Why else is this directive the epitome of absurdity, in my view?

Because our police department already has limited resources on top of an officer vacancy rate that, because of retirements and unfilled positions, will approach 300 officer positions by year's end. This will also be happening during the peak summer months when calls for cruising and too many other crimes to name are keeping officers busy from the start of their shifts until punch out time (and all the while using a police radio system that doesn't seem to work correctly!).

Also, patrol officers are now being asked to conduct criminal investigations typically handled by detectives. In addition, many of our patrols these days are ONE OFFICER patrol squads, not the two officer squads of days past.

The statewide smoking ban should be enforced by the state, not the MPD. If the state can find \$1 million to study racial profiling, then at least it should be able to find the resources to send to Milwaukee to cover the costs of having our officers bust illegal tavern smokers.

Am I the only one who thinks the smoking patrol idea is absurd?