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**CHEERS GREET SMOKE BAN VOTE; BARKEEPS SAY LAW IS HURTING BUSINESS**  
Anne Burke Daily News Staff Writer

Bar owners and tavern workers cheered news Thursday that California's month-old smoking ban just might go up in smoke, saying the law has socked it to them at the cash register.

"I'd love to see the law repealed. . . . It might bring my business back," said Craig Holman, owner of Pickwick Pub in Woodland Hills, where business reportedly has dropped about 40 percent since the ban took effect Jan. 1.

In a 42-24 vote, the state Assembly on Wednesday narrowly approved a bill that would suspend enforcement of the smoking ban for two years, or until federal authorities set up uniform national standards regulating bar smoking. The measure required a majority of the 80-seat Assembly.

It faces a tougher crowd in the state Senate. Last year, the Senate let languish a bill that would have allowed smoking in bars, bingo parlors and card clubs to continue.

But many bar owners say they are desperate for repeal, which under the Assembly bill would not occur until next January.

"I think it should be right now," said Claudia Lawson of Claudia's Bar and Grill in the Antelope Valley. "I might have to go out of business by the end of the year."

Lawson said business at her Palmdale Boulevard bar has dropped 35 percent since the law took effect.

According to the California Licensed Beverage Association, business has dropped as much as 85 percent at many California bars since the prohibition took effect.

Proprietor Darryl Georges said he doesn't know how much longer he can keep doors open at his Middle East Connection restaurant and nightclub in Burbank.

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Georges said receipts have dropped 50 percent at the Burbank Boulevard night stop. Most of his customers are cigarette or cigar smokers, and they're taking their business to night spots with lax enforcement of the ban, Georges said.

Other establishments' customers still are coming, but not spending as much money. The smoking ban "is killing their mood," Georges said.

At Pickwick Pub, Holman said he's strictly enforcing the ban, and most customers don't mind stepping outside for a nicotine fix, in between dart games and draughts of Guinness.

But other proprietors are not as vigilant about enforcing the law, Holman said. As a result, many customers have switched to taverns where they can indulge in their favorite elixirs - tobacco and booze.

"The people who are being punished are the ones who are obeying the law," Holman said.

But some bar owners, even those who initially opposed the ban, said the prohibition has had little effect on their revenues, and they'd like to see it continue.

"The bartenders say that sometimes late at night, we're losing a little business. But personally, I like the non-smoking, and I think customers in the restaurant like it," said Greg Sadofsky of Stanley's restaurant and bar in Sherman Oaks.

Since the law took effect, Los Angeles County tobacco control authorities have mailed about 200 letters of complaint to tavern owners involved in alleged violations of the law.

Proprietors can be fined \$100 for the first offense, up to \$7,000 after repeated violations.

There have been scattered reports of smoking citations throughout Los Angeles County, but tobacco control authorities were not able to provide an official tally.

Though heavily backed by lobbyists for the tobacco and gambling industries, last year's bill to permit smoking was declared a dead letter by state Senate President Pro Tem Bill Lockyer, D-Hayward.

Sen. John Burton, D-San Francisco, who next month will take Lockyer's place as president pro tem, said the legislation could face tough going in his house.

Burton said he opposes the bill and that it might have to survive a vote in an additional committee to reach the Senate floor.

"In the past it's gone to the Judiciary Committee," he said. "Maybe (the Health Committee) should look at part of it."

The Health Committee chairwoman, Sen. Diane Watson, D-Los Angeles, predicted that the bill would be defeated if it's sent to her panel, unless it's amended in some way to protect employees from secondhand tobacco smoke.

State Sen. W.J. "Pete" Knight, R-Palmdale, said he would support lifting the ban.

"It should be left up to (each) business," said Knight, a smoker.