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Clean-air bill: Near-miss

THE CLEAN Indoor Air Act died on the ~~next-to-last~~ day of the 1991 Florida Legislature. Cause of death: Homicide by killer amendment. The assassin was hired by the tobacco lobby, dressed in a clever disguise, and transported to the scene of the crime by none other than Dade's Rep. James Burke, a Democrat.

The "clean" original bill attempted to protect Florida's 10 million nonsmokers from passive smoking, often identified as America's third-leading cause of preventable death. It would have barred indoor smoking at day-care centers, schools, colleges, and common areas of certain other buildings. Restaurants seating more than 50 would have had to designate at least 35 percent of their seats for nonsmokers.

Early in the session, a clean clean-air bill cleared the House 103-8. In the Senate it whizzed through three committees and passed 31-3 on the floor. Yet because the Senate had added two minor amendments, the bill had to go back to the House.

Meanwhile, the tobacco lobby went all out to have the House attach a "Smokers' Rights Amendment" to the bill. This killer amendment's supporters tried to portray it as a civil-rights measure. In the debate,

'DIRTY 20' KILL STATE ACTION

West Palm Beach's Rep. Lois Frankel, a Democrat, drily punctured that charade. "Oh great," she said, "we have Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Susan B. Anthony, and now Phillip Morris."

In the ensuing showdown, however, the killer amendment won 60-51, dooming the bill for this year and — according to the *St. Petersburg Times* — causing Phillip Morris's lobbyist to jump up and down and shout: "Yea, yea!" Such devotees of civil rights, those tobacco lobbyists.

A shift of just five votes would have sent a clean bill to the governor. Instead, nonsmokers face yet another year of gagging on foul air. For that, South Floridians can thank the 20 area legislators who voted for the killer amendment.

From Dade, it was Reps. Burke, Cosgrove, DeGrandy, Diaz-Balart, Garcia, Gordon, Gutman, Logan, Morse, Reaves, Rojas, Silver, and Valdes; from Broward, Reps. Deutsch, Stafford, Tobin, and Young; from Palm Beach, Reps. Hanson, Healey, and Liberti. Remember the "Dirty 20" the next time you can't breathe because of smoke.

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