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Bills to Restrict Smoking Pass Va. Senate

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Bills that would outlaw lighting up in bars, restaurants and public places won Virginia Senate passage Tuesday.

With no debate and scant dissent, the four bills rushed through the Democratic-controlled Senate by comfortable margins.

But they now head to the Republican-run House where smoking bans have gone for years to die.

Two of the bills would allow cities and counties to tailor smoking bans to their own tastes.

The measure sponsored by Sen. Louise Lucas, D-Portsmouth, passed on a 23-16 vote and spawned the only dissent voiced on the floor.

Sen. Mark Obenshain, R-Harrisonburg, incredulously asked Lucas whether the bill "would allow localities to ban smoking anywhere they want, including businesses, including homes, including cars ... anywhere?"

"Yes," Lucas replied. "It allows a locality to exceed those requirements."

A similar measure by Sen. Frederick M. Quayle, R-Suffolk, passed on a 30-10 vote.

A bill by Sen. Ralph Northam, D-Norfolk, to bar smoking in all indoor restaurants passed on a 26-13 vote.

A proposed ban on smoking in public buildings and other areas by Sen. Mary Margaret Whipple, D-Arlington, passed 24-15.

Her bill would not apply in private homes, automobiles and businesses, private clubs, hotel rooms designated for smoking, tobacco stores and manufacturers, and in private and semiprivate rooms in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Failure to comply would result in a \$100 fine.

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