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for equality
at colleges
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versity got up and moved to the other
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As thousands of students took part
in walkouts and rallies on college cam-
puses across the country Thursday in a show of sol-
idarity with protesters at the University of Missouri,
SEE RACISM | 4A

Ban on smoking inside of public housing proposed

By David R. Martin and Jennifer C. Kerr
The Associated Press

NEW YORK | The federal government's proposal Thurs-
day to ban smoking inside and out of public housing
nationwide got a decidedly mixed reaction from the
people most affected.

Some who suffer from secondhand smoke were thrilled,
but others, including some non-smokers, worried that it
gives the government yet another reason to harass or
even evict poor people for doing what would otherwise
be a legal activity in the privacy of their own homes.

"I think it is completely bogus," said Devante Barrett,
a 24-year-old non-smoker who lives in the Elliot-Chelsea
Houses in Manhattan's gritty Chelsea neighborhood.
"You might as well have us all chained up in bondage
now."

Smoking is already banned in about 20 percent of the
nation's federally subsidized housing. The Department
of Housing and Urban Development wants to extend
that to the other 940,000 units around the country, in
cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and
Miami.

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SMOKING

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"I would not like that. And other residents wouldn't like that either. But I would have to comply with it," said chain-smoker Dana Jones, shaking her head as she escorted her 11-year-old son past a clutch of smokers outside Bethel Towers, an apartment complex next to a church in downtown Atlanta.

But her son said he tells her every day that she needs to stop, and Jones acknowledged that a federal ban would probably force her to finally abandon the habit.

HUD Secretary Julian Castro said a nationwide ban would protect more than 760,000 children and save about \$153 million a year in health care costs, repairs and preventable fires.

"Everyone — no matter where they live — deserves a chance to grow up in a healthy, smoke-free home," said the surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy. "There is no safe level of secondhand smoke."

The rule would ban lit tobacco products — cigarettes, cigars or pipes — in all residences, indoor common areas and administrative offices. Smoking also would be prohibited outdoors within 25 feet of buildings. Electronic cigarettes that emit vapor but not smoke would not be subject to the ban.

The public now has 60 days to comment, and the ban would take effect 18 months after the rule is finalized.

"The clock starts today," said Ed Cabrera, a HUD spokesman in San Francisco.

He said residents will be asked for their input as officials figure out how to enforce the rule, looking to see what's worked in the 60 percent of public housing in California where smoking is already banned.

The policy will probably become part of each lease agreement, and enforcement will depend largely on complaints by other residents, Cabrera said.

"Tenants who don't comply and continue to smoke could face possible eviction," Cabrera said. "One thing that we've stressed is that we're not targeting residents as a way to get them to quit smoking. We just want to make our properties smoke-free so they're safer for everyone."

It's all too much for Luis Torres, 64, who said he's lived in New York public housing for 44 years. He's been ticketed for smoking in the hallway, which is already illegal, and said he doesn't smoke in his apartment because his son has asthma. He's particularly upset that the ban would apply inside people's homes.

"That's private. You can do everything you want in your apartment. Not what the government say," Torres said. "If you get sex with your wife, they're going to check your sex too? No way."

In balmy Miami, smokers strolled amid flower beds and palm trees at the Robert King High Towers across the street from the Florida Marlins stadium. Most of the 315 units are studio apartments occupied by senior citizens.

"Magnificent!" said Mercedes Valencia, who is 75 and suffers from asthma, when told of the proposed ban.

But her neighbor, Gerardo Barro, called it unfair.

"I don't bother anyone. I just close my apartment and smoke inside," Barro said. "I would hate if I cannot do it anymore, even inside my own property."

HUD began encouraging public housing agencies to adopt smoke-free policies in 2009. Currently, more than 228,000 public housing units are smoke-free, in cities including Boston, Seattle, Minneapolis, San Antonio and Detroit.

"This is a natural step to continue to spread the smoke-free protections that started with workplaces and then spread to restaurants and bars," said Michael Siegel, professor of Community Health Sciences at Boston University's School of Public Health.

But Jamila Michener, an assistant professor of government at Cornell University, called it a "misdirection of energy" that could lead to evictions. HUD would have more impact on public health by enrolling public housing residents in Medicaid, which covers smoking cessation services, she said.

While not commenting directly on the proposed rule, Philip Morris USA says in a policy statement that it agrees that people should be able to avoid secondhand smoke in many public places and on the job. At the same time, the company says "owners of private residences and other private places should determine the smoking policy for that particular location."

Calls and emails seeking comment to British American Tobacco were not immediately returned.