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Governor Doyle: Statewide smoking ban 'very doable'

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Gov. James Doyle wouldn't guarantee a statewide smoking ban, but called it "very doable."

"I think the need for a statewide ban is very necessary," he said in a telephone interview Friday afternoon with The Reporter and several other Wisconsin newspapers.

Doyle said it's his experience that establishments located in cities with a ban in place have mostly seen an increase in business.

A statewide ban, he added, would solve the problems of cities like Fond du Lac that are "unfairly burdened by a patchwork" created when adjacent communities do not have a ban.

Doyle applauded the efforts of Fond du Lac residents and officials to get a smoking ban passed. The ban became effective Feb. 2.

"I've been fighting now for 2½ years (for a statewide ban) — the time has come to enact it," Doyle said.

Education

Doyle said the most important emphasis in his budget is getting more money into education.

"Almost every other state is cutting education — we're actually putting more into it," he said.

Doyle proposed to abolish the QEO — Qualified Economic Offer — that has limited teacher raises since 1994.

He said work is being done on methods for school districts to come out from under revenue caps.

"We want to do it in a way that protects taxpayers, but eliminates some of the rigidity that has occurred over the years because of caps," he said.

Doyle said there are two ways federal stimulus funds will affect school districts.

One will be to help maintain current programs; another will be for special education and Title 1 programs.

Taxes

Doyle addressed a reporter's question about a hot-button item that was included in the governor's budget — a tax on Internet music purchases.

"I have always supported the idea that purchases over the Internet should be taxed," he said. "With streamlined sales taxes, we are restoring real fairness. I've worked very closely with retailers in the

state and it's very unfair that they hire people and have a sales tax and their competitor on the Internet does not."

Doyle is proposing a sales tax on a variety of digital downloads, including music, movies, ringtones, electronic books and greeting cards.

A 75-cent per pack cigarette tax increase, Doyle said, is designed to discourage people from smoking.

"It's going to be a very happy day for me when we haven't collected a dime on the cigarette tax," he said.

A tax on oil companies helps ensure that a tax burden doesn't fall on the middle class.

As part of the governor's budget, income tax increases would not affect anyone making less than \$300,000, Doyle said.

The governor's budget unveiled last week makes the deepest cuts the state has ever faced, cutting \$2.2 billion over the next biennium, he said.

He said the state will spend less tax money in 2009 and 2010 than it did in 2008.

It will use \$2.1 billion in federal stimulus cash to protect education and health-care programs while working to close a budget gap of \$5.7 billion.

"I'm very proud that we've dealt with a very difficult budget without putting it on the backs of the middle class," he said.
