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Advocates: cigarette tax an incentive to quit

BY HEATHER SCHAEFER
REGIONAL EDITOR

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With a new federal cigarette tax increase in effect and a proposal from governor Jim Doyle to hike up the state cigarette tax, smokers may soon find they can no longer afford to light up.

Maureen Busalacchi, executive director of Smoke Free Wisconsin, and Niki Kostrova, Oneida County Tobacco Control Coordinator, say increasing cigarette taxes is an important step toward reducing smoking in Wisconsin. In a recent visit to Rhinelander, Busalacchi said making cigarettes more expensive gives smokers an incentive to quit and deters young people thinking of taking up the habit.

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Since the state cigarette tax was increased to \$1.77 per pack last year, sales are down 13 percent. Calls to the state's Tobacco Quit Line have also increased since the federal government implemented its 62 cent cigarette tax hike on March 31, Busalacchi said.

Busalacchi said she doesn't believe the tax hikes are unfair to addicts since

cessation resources are readily available. Smokers who call the quit line (1-800-QUIT NOW) receive free confidential support as well as medications that can help curb the desire for tobacco.

Since smoking costs state taxpayers billions in health care costs every year, it's logical to charge smokers more to feed their habit, Busalacchi added. Wisconsin residents pay \$9.53 in health care costs and lost productivity for every pack of cigarettes sold, she said.

Rob Swearingen, owner of the Al-Gen restaurant in Rhinelander and president of the Tavern League of Wisconsin, argues cigarette taxes are already high enough.

"People have been taxed enough, that's the sentiment we're hearing anyway," he said.

While Busalacchi and Kostrova believe it's past time Wisconsin passed a smoking ban, Swearingen says the Tavern League will continue to fight such a mandate.



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Swearingen said he thinks the governor made a mistake when he placed a proposed smoking ban in the state budget. He said the subject should be debated as a standalone topic and added that he adamantly believes the business community cannot tolerate a smoking ban right now.

"We are dealing with the worst economy since World War II," he said, adding that a smoking ban would likely be "the final nail in the coffin" for many "mom and pop" restaurants and taverns across the state.

"Now is not the time for a comprehensive, extreme smoking ban," he said.

Busalacchi disputes the argument that smoking bans kill businesses. She said studies have shown that communities that pass bans are not only pleased with the results but also see a sustained positive impact on health.

If a comprehensive smoking ban is passed, all businesses would be on a level playing field, she added.

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Whatever wrote on Apr 15, 2009 9:10 AM:

" There are smoking establishments and non-smoking establishments.

But I pay income taxes, property taxes, sales tax and every other tax that everyone else pays. But I am not 12. If I want to smoke and choose to smoke I do not need anyone warning me about the dangers. I KNOW!! But I am an adult, it is legal and my choice.

Quit making me pay for the dead beats mom and pops who suck off the system then blame me for rising costs!! "

more disgusted wrote on Apr 15, 2009 8:19 AM:

" hey disgusted.....your right....smoking is not illegal and it is a person's choice to do it...but take it outside....don't harm the people around you...especially children. Do you know that the smoke left on clothing, hair, and even left in the building on walls, furniture, etc... still contains very harmful cancer causing chemicals for the people around it?? And what about those who work in the smoking environments?? Take it outside. "

Beth wrote on Apr 15, 2009 3:50 AM:

" Im a Smoker and if taken all of this sitting down. Well my biggest grip is what about Alcohol??? Where are the higher tax rates on that?? It may only affect the drinker as they are sipping it but it also effects the family and community. How many people are killed each year to a drunk driver, how many children are beaten/abused because of a drunk parent, how many spouses are abused/beaten because of a drunk spouse. AND how many die of liver disease? WHEN are we gonna look at that part of legal substances and not just one???"

Bob wrote on Apr 14, 2009 9:48 PM:

" Actually, the ban IS a budget issue. Illinois knew it was going to lose revenue when the ban was passed, but it took over a year to finally start acting on raising taxes and fees to compensate. Using the budget as an issue, the Wisconsin taxes and fees can be automatically budgeted in right from the start, as soon as the ban becomes effective. They can avoid the mistake that Illinois made in delaying the budget issue. Scroll down just a little to see the "fiscal note" in the Illinois ban bill. www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=SB&DocNum=500&GAID=9&SessionID=51&LegID=28191 "

Dianna wrote on Apr 14, 2009 8:51 PM:

" Get real! Higher prices will not encourage smokers to quit. Seeing their parents in ICU with respiratory problems didn't stop some of them from quitting. Seeing their grandparents die didn't encourage them to quit smoking! What you will see is less money spent on necessities, i.e, clothes, food...they may let their car insurance lapse...they WILL NOT give up smoking! I was told that by a smoker. "

Smokes wrote on Apr 14, 2009 7:51 PM:

" Very good Kathleen, you are exercising your right to chose where to dine, whether you dislike the food, management, prices, smoke, the other clientle, it makes no difference because you do not have to go there. Why not just make that decision rather than infringe on the rights of property and business owners. "

Brad wrote on Apr 14, 2009 7:30 PM:

" I live in Illinois, but frequently travel to Rhinelander. In Illinois, voters passed a smoking ban in public places about 2 years ago. The Illinois taverns and restaurants that I frequent don't seem to have any less business since the smoking ban went into effect. Our good friend, a smoker, who is a cocktail waitress in our favorite local

tavern, was skeptical, but now admits that she feels better after working her night shift. She continues to smoke, but in a designated smoking area established outside of the tavern. As a result of the Illinois smoking ban in public places, she is not exposed to the great amount of second hand smoke while at work. Bottom line, banning smoking in public places has not appeared to hurt Illinois businesses and even some smokers have welcomed the ban. "

Kathleen Cooper-Loher wrote on Apr 14, 2009 6:24 PM:

" I am tired of reading about Rob Swearingen's opinion about the proposed smoking ban. He cannot predict the future - he has no proof that small "mom and pop" restaurants and taverns would fail if a smoking ban were put into effect. What can be predicted, though, is that customers, business owners, and their employees would be at greater risk for disease and death from the effects of second hand smoke. Mr. Swearingen needs to join the 21st century and advocate healthy living instead of promoting his own self interest. Because of his negative publicity, I would not eat at his establishment if the food was free. "

Billy Bob wrote on Apr 14, 2009 5:17 PM:

" Since smoking costs state taxpayers billions in health care costs every year, it's logical to charge smokers more to feed their habit, Busalacchi added. Wisconsin residents pay \$9.53 in health care costs and lost productivity for every pack of cigarettes sold, she said.

These numbers are ridiculous. Billions each year, come on, lets see that number be supported with facts. "

Billy Bob wrote on Apr 14, 2009 4:59 PM:

" The beginning of the end folks. OH, that's right, these things are only being done because they are "best for us". "

John wrote on Apr 14, 2009 2:42 PM:

" Raise food tax??? Poor argument. Food is necessary to live and what about those with large families?? They have to buy more food and would pay higher tax? Everyone needs food, no one needs cigarettes. Smoking kills. It kills the person doing it and the people around them. Raise the tax. "

The FACTS wrote on Apr 14, 2009 2:38 PM:

" The difference is.....eating, obesity, high cholesterol.....they don't hurt the people around them. Smoking does. If someone chooses to drink lots of soda and eat poorly, they affect only their own health. Those who choose to smoke, affect the health of everyone around them, including children and health care costs rise for everyone, not just one person. Also, the rise in tax DOES prevent many children from starting. "

disgusted wrote on Apr 14, 2009 11:54 AM:

" First, let me state that I quit smoking several years ago. My decision. I am so sick of these smug zealots trying to force their personal beliefs on the rest of us. Smoking is legal. There are many, many restaurants and businesses that ban smoking, so if a person wants to avoid smoke it is easy to do. Why don't these do-gooders concentrate their energies on illegal activities and leave law abiding citizens to make their own decisions? "

Enough is Enough wrote on Apr 14, 2009 9:59 AM:

" We already pay 1.77 per pack of cigarettes. When is enough enough and where will it stop?

Obesity causes an increase in health care costs as well. New York has already passed a tax for sugared soft drinks.

Medical costs have seen a dramatic increase over the past decade due to high cholesterol.

You blame it on smoking, but taxpayer beware, they are starting with the smokers. . moving to the obese. . .the real question should be who is next? "

Denny wrote on Apr 14, 2009 9:58 AM:

" Here's another good idea, and one that should be considered for Wisconites who are among the most obese folks in the country. Let's put a tax on food if the person buying it is fat; that would certainly be an incentive for fat people to lose weight and for young people not to take up poor eating habits. And it would lower insurance rates, and those of us who aren't fat wouldn't have to continue to pay through taxes, and increased medical costs for those who are.

See? It's a ridiculous concept. It is unjust to tax a particular group of people simply because what they do is unpopular. If you don't like smoking, then find a way to make it illegal. "

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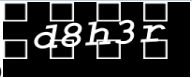


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