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Time right for smoking ban

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It's time for Wisconsin to ban smoking in all workplaces.

A statewide smoking ban, as proposed in Gov. Jim Doyle's budget, makes good sense for business and public health.

Eighty percent of Wisconsin residents are nonsmokers and as such should be protected from the health hazards of secondhand smoke. As the U.S. Surgeon General reported in 2006, scientific research shows there's no risk-free exposure of secondhand smoke. People who are exposed to it have a much higher risk of developing heart disease, lung cancer, respiratory illnesses and many other chronic and acute diseases. That's a fact.

Secondhand smoke also fuels the rising cost of health care, which is paid for through higher taxes and insurance premiums on taxpayers and businesses.

As for the claim that a smoking ban will choke the profits of Wisconsin bars and restaurants, other states with similar laws have found that concern not to be the case. If anything, such bans have led to an increase in revenue at eating and drinking establishments in smoke-free communities. Statewide smoke-free laws are already in place in Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa, so Wisconsin smokers won't be crossing state lines.

Finally, there's the argument that the state shouldn't tell a business how to run itself. While that's good in theory, it's not reality. Government already regulates businesses to protect public health and safety. A statewide smoking ban would protect businesses' customers and workers from another health hazard.

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