

BURNING QUESTIONS

A plan for a ban

Statewide smoking bill will be hot topic again

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Though the budget deficit and economic concerns will be the main focus of attention in the state Legislature this year, it won't be the only focus.

There will be another push to create a statewide workplace **smoking ban**, to bring to the rest of the state the type of ban already passed by Appleton and other communities in Wisconsin.

Here's a look at a ban's prospects — its support and its obstacles:

What happened to it last year?

A Senate version of the bill, authored by Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, died early in the year after no compromise could be reached. Opponents, led by Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, at first suggested allowing bars to have "smoking rooms." Though that idea was scuttled, they held firm on wanting to delay implementation of a ban on bars until April 2011. And they wanted to prevent other communities from passing their own bans in the meantime.

Risser's bill, which had passed a Senate committee, would have started this month, with bars and restaurants exempted until January 2010. Bill proponents were steadfast that they couldn't compromise any more than that.

Rep. Steve Wieckert, R-Appleton, authored the Assembly version of the bill and helped lead the push for a ban. But the bill never got a vote in the full Assembly. And Wieckert decided not to run for re-election in November.

Are there already plans to introduce a bill this year?

Yes. Risser has said he'll bring it back in the Senate. On the Assembly side, Rep. Jon Richards, D-Milwaukee, who was the lead Democrat on the issue last year, and Rep. Mark Gottlieb, R-Port Washington, said they'll reintroduce the ban bill, too. Wieckert's replacement — Rep. Penny Bernard Schaber, D-Appleton — will be among the main sponsors, as well.

The bill, according to Richards, will set the implementation of a ban at 60 days after the bill becomes law. That includes bars and restaurants.

"I don't want this to drag on indefinitely," he said. "I don't see a reason to delay it."

He added that he'd like the Legislature take up the ban bill as early as this spring.

Will there be another attempt at compromise?

Yes. Decker and those who oppose the ban, will be adamant about a phase-in period for bars, at least — probably a couple of years. Propo-

