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Commentary: Wisconsin is going smoke-free: But the battle has just begun

Wisconsin is going smoke-free.

Eighty-six legislators voted in favor of workers' health and for safer workplace environments, including restaurants and bars.

And that means bartenders, wait staff, musicians and others will experience fewer colds, runny noses, itchy eyes and other signs of respiratory distress, and more importantly, fewer cases of cancer, emphysema, heart attacks and other horrible diseases caused by exposure to secondhand smoke. All are indisputable benefits of smoke-free workplaces.

It's been a long and important battle for SmokeFree Wisconsin, an organization that has worked with local communities and state leaders to bring smoke-free air to Wisconsin citizens for the past nine years.

But now that Wisconsin is the 27th state to pass a smoke-free workplace law, what's next for SmokeFree Wisconsin?

Plenty.

We have and will continue to focus on policies that we know reduce youth tobacco use — like raising the price of cigarettes and other tobacco products through higher taxes and funding prevention and educational programs.

While the tobacco industry continues to target and addict youth by developing and marketing candy-flavored products that hook kids on new types of tobacco products, we must step up efforts to prevent tobacco addiction.

We already have a successful and proven tobacco control program in place. There is a strong correlation between the beginning of the program and the 40 percent reduction in youth smoking over the course of the past seven years. If we discontinue or reduce tobacco control programs targeted at youth, smoking rates will climb back up. And the cycle of addiction, disease and death will continue to devastate Wisconsin families.

Not only do kids need support, but adult smokers do as well.

The state-sponsored tobacco Quitline has received tens of thousands of calls from smokers who want to quit tobacco for good, and we simply must do everything we can to help the 1 million tobacco users in this state.

Our work is not done, and our task will not be easy. But what's at stake is staggering.

Tobacco is the biggest cause of preventable, premature death and disease in Wisconsin, claiming nearly 8,000 lives every year.

And the cost to Wisconsin citizens to treat tobacco-related diseases is real (to the tune of more than \$2 billion each year). We all pay these costs in the form of higher health insurance premiums, so it's in

everyone's interest to reduce the number of smokers in our state.

So today let's celebrate Wisconsin becoming a smoke-free state — and thank the 86 forward-thinking legislators who chose health and prevention by voting for a smoke-free Wisconsin. They will go down in history as leaders who rescued many thousands of our citizens from premature death and illness.

But tomorrow, here at SmokeFree Wisconsin, we'll roll up our sleeves and continue our daily battle against tobacco — and its devastating path of destruction.

Maureen Busalacchi is executive director of SmokeFree Wisconsin.
