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State lawmakers reach smoking-ban deal

*By Amy Olson
and DJ Slater*

Almost every Wisconsin workplace, including all bars and restaurants, would be required to go smoke-free under a compromise reached Wednesday by state legislators.

Bill supporters agreed to delay implementation until July 5, 2010, so that bars would have time to prepare for the change. They also agreed to exempt the handful of existing cigar bars and all tobacco retail shops. In addition, the ban would not apply to Wisconsin casinos because the Indian tribes who run them are sovereign nations.

"No legislation is perfect. No compromise will satisfy everyone," said Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, who wrote the Senate's bill. The agreement will achieve the ultimate goal of saving lives and saving taxpayer money, he said.

Smokers would be fined \$100 to \$250 for lighting up in businesses covered by the ban. Employees and business owners who fail to attempt to stop someone from smoking could be fined \$200.

The bill would supersede local ordinances, such as Wausau's smokeless ordinance exempting taverns. It would allow bar and restaurant owners to designate outdoor areas where smoking would be permitted.

The smoking ban will be an adjustment for members of the Tavern League of Wisconsin, said Rob Swearingen, its president. He said he hopes the economy will turn around and help offset potential losses.

But the bill doesn't go far enough for smoke-free advocates.

"I'm disappointed they're taking so long with implementation," said Judy Burrows, director of chronic disease prevention at the Marathon County Health Department.

State Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, played a key role in brokering the agreement, said Eric Schutt, state director of government relations for the American Cancer Society. Decker said he's glad to see all stakeholders in the smoking debate find a compromise.

"Generally, when you get opposing factions together and they sign off on it, that's a good sign that it's going to go through (the Assembly and Senate)," Decker said.

State Rep. Donna Seidel, D-Wausau, wanted to see the ban take effect sooner, but said she's glad the state eventually will be smoke-free.

"The end goal will be achieved, and that's a positive thing," Seidel said.

Additional Facts

