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## Schedule the smoking votes

An editorial

March 6, 2008

Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch, R-West Salem, and Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, are members of different parties. And they do a reasonably good job of pretending to be on opposite sides of fundamental issues.

But they are working as a bipartisan team to prevent passage of a statewide smoking ban.

And they are both wrong.

Huebsch and Decker are trying to run out the clock on the current legislative session without acting on the proposed ban.

They are on the wrong side of the public health debate -- every bit of evidence,

every bit,

argues for taking strong steps to restrict smoking. As cycling champion Lance Armstrong, a cancer survivor who founded and heads the Lance Armstrong Foundation, says: The Wisconsin ban should be enacted "yesterday."

They are on the wrong side of regional trends -- other states are moving fast and smart to enact such bans because they know the bans are important to attracting tourism and business.

And they are on the wrong side of Wisconsin.

Huebsch and Decker should listen to what was said Tuesday, when more than 1,000 Wisconsinites from every background and every corner of the state gathered at Monona Terrace to say: Pass the ban!

"This is about basic democracy," Gov. Jim Doyle told a crowd. "When you have legislators of both parties who support it, it seems the simple thing to do is put it out on the floor and take a vote."

That was a direct message to Huebsch and Decker.

And it was amplified by Armstrong, whose foundation advocates for cancer research and smoke-free policies.

"When 70 percent of the people say yes (to a smoke-free policy)," Armstrong explained, "the people we elected should represent that and should certainly not stand in the way and hold pieces of legislation hostage."

There is not much time.

The legislative session is set to end March 13.

Huebsch and Decker should move to schedule votes in their respective chambers.

The key here is the scheduling of the vote, not how Huebsch or Decker actually vote on the proposal. If they oppose a ban, for whatever reason, that's fine. But it is wrong for these legislative leaders to use their positions to block necessary votes on critical public health issues.

If Huebsch and Decker fail to act because they are in hock to the special interests that oppose this legislation, responsible legislators should pull the proposal from committee, bring it to the floor and pass the smoking ban.

If it is necessary for serious lawmakers to go around their leaders and force a vote on this issue, they should not stop there.

After they have voted to enact the smoking ban, they might want to consider assembling in their respective caucuses and voting for new leaders.

The Assembly is not well served by a Republican speaker who blocks votes on key issues.

The Senate is not well served by a Democratic majority leader who blocks votes on key issues.

Wisconsin is not being well served by Mike Huebsch and Russ Decker on this issue.

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