



PHOTO BY RANDY HANSON

Gov. Jim Doyle addresses a group of about 50 people, mostly public and health care officials, Wednesday morning, Jan. 9, at Pier 500 restaurant and bar in Hudson. Anti-smoking forces say Wisconsin will become known as "the ashtray of the Midwest" if it doesn't adopt a ban in all public places.

Governor calls for smoke-free Wisconsin

Urges Legislature to act during stop in Hudson

By Randy Hanson
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Gov. Jim Doyle called on people to urge their state legislators to approve a statewide smoking ban in all public places during a stop at Pier 500 restaurant in Hudson Wednesday morning, Jan. 9.

"Whether you like the ban or don't like the ban, it is going to happen," he said. "The entire United States will be smoke-free at some time."

Doyle said he favors an immediate ban on indoor public smoking to the gradual ban that passed the state Senate Committee on Public Health by a 3-2 vote on Tuesday, Jan. 8.

The ban approved by the Senate committee wouldn't apply to bars and restaurants until Jan. 1, 2010. Smoking would be prohibited in other workplaces and public buildings starting Jan. 1, 2009.

The Democratic governor said ending indoor public smoking is

the final step of a three-step strategy to confront the dangers of tobacco.

The first step, he said, was raising the cigarette tax by \$1 per pack, which was approved by the Legislature last October as part of the 2007-09 state budget. The Legislature also dedicated \$30 million over the biennium to helping people quit smoking, which Doyle said was the second step of his plan.

He said opponents of the cigarette tax increase who argued that it wouldn't cause anyone to quit smoking were wrong.

In the first week after the tax was implemented on Jan. 1, the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line took calls from 9,000 smokers, he said, which was equal to the number of calls it received for all of 2007.

"The tax does work and we know it works," he said.

Doyle related that he had tuned in to a talk radio program in which the host was criticizing the tax increase, saying it

wouldn't cause people to stop smoking, only to receive several phone calls from smokers who said they would quit because of it.

About 50 people, mostly public officials and proponents of the smoking ban, attended the gathering. Doyle came to Hudson from St. Paul, where he had spent part of the morning with Minnesota Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty talking about a regional strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote the production of renewable sources of energy.

He was welcomed to Hudson and introduced by Pier 500 owner Andy Kron.

Kron indicated that he wasn't necessarily a supporter of the smoking ban, but said he welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the proposed legislation. Pier 500 already is smoke-free until after 10 p.m. each day.

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Governor / State Rep. Kitty Rhoades prefers letting owners and customers decide

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The Wisconsin Restaurant Association has come out in favor of Senate Bill 150.

Ruth Farniot, director of government relations for the American Cancer Society, was the first of several audience members to comment on the proposed smoking ban after Doyle had spoken.

"It is an honor to be here with such a stalwart public health defender," Farniot said of Doyle.

She noted that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency declared cigarette smoke to be a Class A carcinogen more than 10 years ago.

Chuck Mehls, vice commander of American Legion Post 80 in New Richmond and a member of the St. Croix County Board, reported that the Legion post voted 62-1 to go smoke-free when it opened its new building last October. Rentals of the post's facilities have tripled since then, he said.

St. Croix County Board Chairman Clarence "Buck" Mallick thanked Doyle for his leadership on the smoking issue and said the County Board also has wrestled with it.

He said the County Board passed a resolution encouraging the Wisconsin Legislature to ban smoking in public places, and has considered adopting its own countywide ban.

Doyle encouraged the county to move ahead with its own ban. He said the prospects for the statewide ban are uncertain and that independent action by counties and municipalities might push the Legislature to act. A number of Wisconsin municipalities have already adopted smoking bans in public places, including restaurants and bars.

Smoking in restaurants and bars is already illegal in 22 states, including neighboring Minnesota and Illinois.

A Pierce County official said arrests of Minnesotans for drunken driving have increased in that county since Minnesota imposed its smoking ban in bars. Minnesotans are coming to Wisconsin to drink and smoke, he said.

Dr. Paul McGinnis of Hudson Physicians Clinic said some people

were unhappy when it was decided that the Hudson Health Campus that opened in 2003 would be smoke-free.

"That was painful. It was uncomfortable. But it was the right thing to do," said McGinnis, adding that the clinic staff has adjusted to the smoking ban.

"This has been one of my passions, with the interest of patients and my fellow community members at heart," McGinnis said.

He encouraged Doyle to continue to pressure legislators to make all Wisconsin workplaces smoke-free.

"As a physician, I don't accept delays when my patients' lives are on the line. I don't accept exemptions, and I don't accept restrictions," McGinnis said. "We ask our legislators to lead and take our interests to heart, and we need to ask them not to make exemptions, to delay, or to accept other tactics when there are lives on the line."

McGinnis' 11-year-old daughter, Meghan, accompanied him. She told the governor in a conversation following the meeting that her fifth-grade class at E.J. Rock Elementary School supported a smoking ban in all public places.

Mike Passino, owner of Paddy Ryan's Irish Pub in the town of Hudson, also attended the meeting in support of the proposed ban. He said his restaurant has been smoke-free since it opened last year and only two customers have complained about it.

State Rep. Kitty Rhoades, R-Hudson, said in a phone call Monday that her preference would be to let owners and consumers decide whether establishments should be smoke-free.

"But apparently that's not going to be the way that it will go. So then I think the compromise will be dining, yes (smoke-free), bars, no (smoking allowed)," Rhoades said.

She said the Assembly passed a bill last session that would have made dining smoke-free and allowed smoking in bars. The bill didn't become law, however.

"I honestly think that that is probably the compromise that will come from this," Rhoades said. "There is great concern in the northern part of the state over tav-

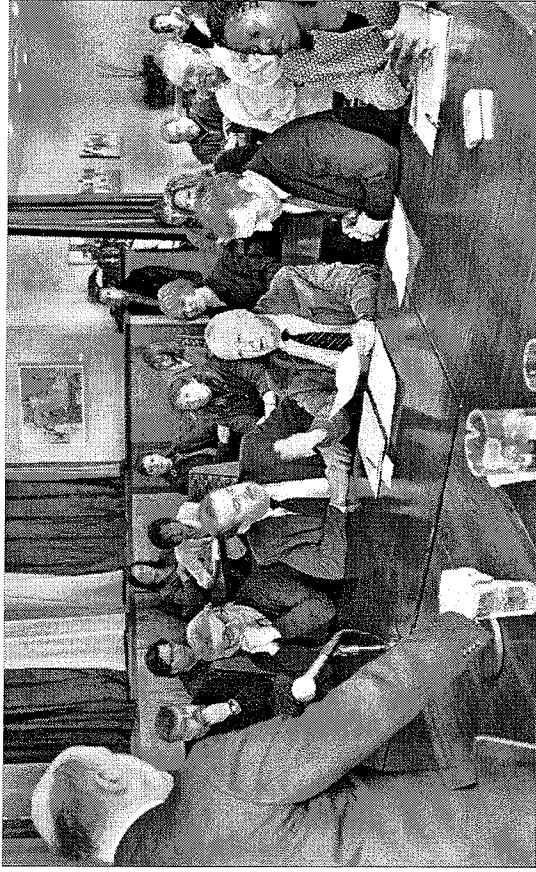


PHOTO BY RANDY HANSON
Clarence "Buck" Mallick, chairman of the St. Croix County Board, tells Gov. Jim Doyle of the board's support for a ban on smoking in all public places. Dr. Paul McGinnis, a Hudson physician for 20 years, is seated next to Mallick on the left. McGinnis also is a proponent of the proposed smoking ban.



PHOTO BY RANDY HANSON

Andy Kron, owner of Pier 500, welcomes Gov. Jim Doyle, seated to Hudson and his restaurant. Kron said he wanted to learn more about the ban on smoking in all workplaces proposed by a state Senate committee.

saying she understands the desire for smoke-free environments.

"At this time, Senate Democratic leadership is talking about a compromise that would phase in taverns," Harsdorf said. "I will wait to see the bill that is offered on the

People have real concerns about this because it is going to have very significant impacts on people's businesses."

State Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls, issued a statement

Senate floor, but ultimately, to control health care costs, we need to be proactive in creating healthier environments for consumers and workers."