

## OUR VIEWS

# State must clear the air this new year

A Janesville man who regularly meets his adult son for lunch dined recently in a downtown bar. They enjoyed the food. But when they met the next week, the son picked a different dining spot. Why? Because he didn't want to smell like cigarette smoke all day.

Bar owners who argue that a smoking ban would kill their businesses are missing out on customers who would dine and drink in their taverns if not for the smoke. They're ignoring evidence that bars and restaurants are surviving in states that have enacted bans.

Owners argue they should have the right to decide whether to allow smoking and that workers who don't want to breathe in smoke can choose to work else-



where. But government has long imposed workplace safety standards. The perils of secondhand smoke are well documented.

Wisconsin must get on board. On Jan. 1, our neighbor to the south, Illinois,

joined the growing number of states that have enacted bans in all workplaces.

It's great that Wisconsin's tax boost of \$1 per pack of cigarettes also kicked in Jan. 1. Experts predict it will force tens of thousands of smokers to quit and tens of thousands of children to never start smoking.

The health benefits will be enormous. A recent analysis showed state taxpayers cough up almost \$500 million annually in Medicaid costs tied directly to smoking.

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association and many other organizations support a statewide ban. They realize that the current patchwork of bans in at least 30 communities creates competitive disadvantages for businesses.

Still, the Wisconsin Tavern League is lobbying against legislation in a state Senate committee. One compromise to the proposed ban on smoking in all workplaces would be a limited phase-in period for bars.

That would do nothing for now to clear the air in taverns. It would do nothing to protect the health of bar patrons and workers. It would do nothing for Wisconsin's progressive image.

But if that's what it takes to overcome the tavern league's campaign donations and strike a deal, let's get on with it.