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Editorial: Governor's unfinished business worth more exploring

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A scorecard on Gov. Jim Doyle's performance in 2007, his first year in office with a legislature split between Democrat and Republican control, isn't too shabby. Doyle managed to get done a lot of the stuff he wanted to done after his fall 2006 reelection, from shuffling the deck of state employees and bureaucracies to create a new children and families department to boosting the cigarette tax by \$1.

As an Associated Press tally of the to-do list notes, the governor didn't get his way on everything. So is the way in politics.

Before the new legislative session really nestles in, and before Doyle's next State of the State address on Wednesday, it's a good idea to look to his unfinished business from the 2007 list.

There are some proposals that not only require the state's attention but represent be passable, meaningful improvements. Far better than proposals and bills that are devised merely for the sake of driving wedges and ensuring fall electability (whatever that is).

Doyle never got a statewide smoking ban in place. This is probably the hottest potato out there. But if the cries of Oshkosh four years ago – the cries the city's restaurant smoking ban would create an uneven "playing field" for city eateries compared to its regional competitors within other borders – are to linger, then it's right for the state legislature to bring a statewide smoking ban forward for an up-or-down vote.

Does Wisconsin outlaw smoking in bars? The legislature needs to debate that. Does it take a page from Toledo, Ohio and outlaw smoking in any workplace with "X" number of workers, finally tying customer smoking to worker health? ... Hmmm? Maybe that's just one more thing to explore and consider.

Doyle also wanted third-party groups involved in elections to follow state campaign finance laws. It's encouraging to hear that there is campaign finance reform energy in the legislature. It's taking the baby-steps approach, first tackling provisions for state Supreme Court races.

But Wisconsin shouldn't get too shy here. The notion of requiring more transparency and disclosure of third-party phantoms using TV ads to appeal to voters' lowest common denominator isn't a bad idea. With presidential and state elections preparing the blitz, senators and representatives able to look beyond their own political futures would have an easy time selling Wisconsinites on the value of third-party transparency.

Just a couple of ideas the governor floated last year that didn't get done but are worth the legislature's time and effort.

Final Thought: Gov. Jim Doyle should push the legislature to move on 2007's unfinished business in his 2008 State of the State address Wednesday evening.