



Go ahead, shock us

Apparently, smoke is getting in our legislators' eyes.

It was nearly a year ago that Governor Jim Doyle called for a statewide ban on smoking in public places.

Twelve months later, the state senate is crawling towards some sort of phased-in **smoking ban**, delaying the ban for restaurants and taverns, and the assembly is doing nothing.

The public's view on the issue is clear. In a 2006 public opinion survey, Wisconsin residents by a two-to-one margin supported a statewide **smoking ban**. Fifty-three percent of those polled said they strongly favor such a ban.

Yet, despite the governor's leadership and clear public sentiment, the legislature fiddles and fumbles.

The Senate Committee on Public Health, Senior Issues, Long Term Care and Privacy did not necessarily have a stellar Tuesday.

The committee on a 3-2 split passed a **smoking ban** which would delay implementation for bars and restaurants until 2010.

Carrie Lynch, a spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, tells us that the committee bill does not have a majority support of senators and won't get scheduled for a vote by Decker.

Local state senator Pat Kreitlow tried to come up with a better compromise committee bill by extending the tavern and restaurant phase-in by a year but was outvoted.

Meanwhile, Rep. Scott Suder, an Assembly Republican, says that he's not convinced his colleagues are willing to enact any **smoking ban**. Suder, for instance, spouts a libertarian argument that the state government has no business telling private business owners that their establishments should be **smoke free**.

The picture we see is a dysfunctional legislature more interested in protecting its relationship with business than public health and,

instead of doing the public will, merely creating the illusion of responsible action.

Yet there is really no good reason why Wisconsin should not have a **smoking ban**. Both Minnesota and Illinois have such a ban. You can't argue, then, that such a ban would hurt Wisconsin's competitive position. According to the US Surgeon General, second hand smoke kills 53,000 non-smokers nationally, including 3,000 by cancer. Why is the Wisconsin legislature paralyzed in taking action to reduce the third leading cause of preventable death in this state? Aren't legislators concerned about the rising cost of health care? The argument from the Wisconsin **Tavern League** and others is that a **smoking ban** would hurt business. Yet isn't it the state's job to regulate business to reasonably protect public health and safety? The paper companies would have a fatter bottom line if they were allowed to spew toxic chemicals into the environment. Does the Wisconsin **Tavern League** support that? The argument, again, is that a statewide **smoking ban** might be okay, but regulations on taverns and restaurants should be delayed, possibly indefinitely. Yet nobody can sincerely argue that tavern and restaurant employees should go without the same protections as other workers. The idea that tavern and restaurant workers choose to breath in everybody else's exhaled tobacco smoke is absurd. No worker should have to choose a job that may lead to lung disease.

A public opinion poll released last month reported that Wisconsin citizens overwhelmingly think state government is strangled by special interest groups and incapable of acting in the public interest.

We call on the state legislature to shock us. Get the **smoking ban** done.



EDITORIAL