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## Get it done for health, schools, lakes

A Wisconsin State Journal editorial  
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It 's as easy as 1-2-3.

The Wisconsin Legislature should quickly pass three high-profile bills this week before adjourning its regular business for the year.

All three of these sensible and important proposals cost little if any state money -- so they won 't make the state 's budget deficit any worse.

Yet their impacts will be hugely positive for public health, education and the Great Lakes.

These three bills are a great opportunity for the Legislature to show the public that the Republican-run Assembly and Democratic-controlled Senate are capable of working together to get big things done on deadline:

**1. Pass the statewide smoking ban.** Committees in both houses have endorsed this proposal, affecting bars and restaurants. It 's time for legislative leaders -- Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, and Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch, R-West Salem -- to allow floor votes to get this done.

If the votes aren 't there, so be it. At least the public will then know where each lawmaker stands. But it appears the votes are in fact there to pass this, if only the legislative leaders would get out of the way.

Madison and other cities across Wisconsin have already banned smoking in most restaurants and bars. So have a slew of states including neighboring Minnesota and Illinois.

The ban in Madison hasn 't been a big deal for smokers, who have accepted the easy courtesy of stepping outside when they want to light up. Some Madison bars even cater to smokers by providing outside patios -- some with heaters in winter -- where smoking is still allowed.

More importantly, non-smoking patrons and especially bar employees inside can enjoy clean air and better health.

A statewide ban would create a level playing field for eating and drinking establishments. This would prevent the negative and unfair financial impact on bars that must compete with neighboring bars located across municipal borders in communities that still allow smoking.

Holding the statewide smoking ban hostage by refusing to allow up-or-down floor votes would be shameful.

**2. Let online schools stay open.** Top education leaders in the Senate and Assembly, with help from the state superintendent of schools, recently agreed on a bill to address legal problems with Wisconsin's online schools. The bill was a shining example of bipartisan cooperation for the good of school children -- until, that is, Gov. Jim Doyle balked at the last minute on behalf of his beloved teachers union.

Now the bill is stuck with the clock quickly winding down on the 2007-2008 legislative session. Republicans have agreed to grant the Democratic governor his demand for an audit of online schools. But Doyle and the teachers union also insist that enrollment in online schools be tightly capped. They so far have even refused a GOP concession that would cap enrollment at 1 percent of the total student population across the state.

A court recently ruled that online schools violate state laws controlling teacher certification, charter schools and open enrollment. But the fault lies not with Wisconsin's dozen virtual schools, which serve 3,500 students who score at or above the state average in most subjects at nearly every grade level. The problem is that existing laws never anticipated students learning over the Internet from home.

The original compromise would have modernized state law and improved accountability and instruction for online schools. Doyle and the teachers union should stop playing games and accept the Assembly's recent concessions for an audit and cap.

**3. Ratify the Great Lakes Compact.** The Senate last week passed this agreement with a bipartisan 26-6 vote. Virtually every other state that touches the Great Lakes is ratifying the compact, which would protect the Great Lakes from large-scale diversions of water.

Unfortunately, some Republicans in the Assembly are now insisting at the last minute that the agreement be rewritten. Their gripe is that the compact gives too much power to individual states around the Great Lakes to veto big diversions of water. But that's already current law. The compact would impose standards and allow for appeal.

Assembly leaders need to stop nitpicking the compact and allow it to move forward.

The Legislature has only a couple of days left to send these three bills to the governor's desk.

Now is the time for action.

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