

## OUR PERSPECTIVE

# Legislature should back public indoor smoking ban

You've come a long way, baby.

The **smoking ban** has come of age.

It officially arrived in Wisconsin last week when Gov. Jim Doyle announced he would seek a statewide ban on smoking in indoor places — including restaurants and bars. Not only that, Doyle said he wanted a \$1.25 per pack boost in the state cigarette tax to \$2.02 and the money would be used to help the state fund smoking cessation efforts and to treat smoke-related illnesses.

Not surprisingly, there was some political blowback from smokers — and some restaurant and tavern owners, who have long argued it is their right to determine how to run their establishments and argue if they choose to allow smoking, why offended non-smokers have the freedom to go someplace else.

It's not an issue of personal freedom. It's an issue of public health.

U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona's made that clear enough last year in his report, "The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke."

"Second-hand smoke is not a mere annoyance," Carmona said. "It is a serious health hazard that can lead to disease and premature death in children and nonsmoking adults." For non-smokers exposure to second-hand smoke can mean a bump-up of 25 percent in their risk of heart disease and 20 to 30 percent in the risk of getting lung cancer, the report said.

Nor is Wisconsin alone in its move to clear the air. Almost half the states in the country have now passed laws banning smoking at the workplace or in restaurants and bars.

And today, France, known for its smoky cafes and the home to both the name "cigarette" and "nicotine"

— taken from Ambassador Jean Nicot who brought tobacco home from Portugal — took its first step down the road to smoke freedom. Beginning today hospitals, schools, shops and other workplaces went **smoke free**. In eleven months, bars and cafes will also have to comply.

On Tuesday the European Union's executive arm declared itself in favor of a **smoking ban** in public places — raising the possibility of nearly an entire continent going **smoke-free**.

"The fact is that passive smoking does kill. Whoever claims this is not proven are just fooling themselves or others," said EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou. He said second-hand smoke in the EU takes an annual toll of more than 79,000 adults each year.

Polls in Europe show that 80 percent of EU citizens favor smoking bans in workplaces and indoor public places.

Polls in Wisconsin by the American Cancer Society have shown that 77 percent support a \$1 increase in the cigarette tax — including a majority of smokers.

According to Wisconsin health care and health advocacy groups, the governor's proposal will prevent more than 67,000 youngsters in the state from taking up the habit, spur 34,000 to 42,000 state residents to quit and prevent some 30,000 premature smoking-related deaths.

Those are worthy goals and ones that are easily within reach to make Wisconsin a healthier place.

We urge the Legislature to adopt Doyle's proposals to protect state youngsters from this heavily addictive drug, to nudge smokers toward a healthier day, and to spare non-smokers the unhealthy insult that has been inflicted on them for far too long.