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## **Doyle's anti-smoking proposals are comprehensive and sweeping**

*By Tribune editorial board*

Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle wants to ban smoking from workplaces — including bars and restaurants.

And he also wants to impose a \$1.25-a-pack increase in state cigarette taxes. That would bring Wisconsin's tax to \$2.02, making it one of the top cigarette taxes in the nation.

According to information published by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, only New Jersey (\$2.58), Rhode Island (\$2.46) and Washington (\$2.03) would be higher.

Both of these actions can be justified. The workplace smoking ban is an issue of public health and safety. While customers can choose which bars and restaurants they patronize, employees must endure secondhand smoke that could endanger their health.

And the high cigarette tax is designed to discourage young people from starting to smoke. If we can do that, we go a long way to preventing the next generation of health problems caused by cigarette smoking.

The public has an interest in this as well, because people who cannot pay their health bills — including smokers — contribute to a cost-shifting that forces all of us to pay higher health care bills and higher insurance premiums.

The proposals are not without their detractors. The Tavern League of Wisconsin opposes the smoking ban, and Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch, R-West Salem, said Republicans will oppose the tax increase. Brandon Scholz, executive director of the Wisconsin Grocers Association, said the tax hike will hurt "the Main Street retailer."

Locally, Republican Sen. Dan Kapanke opposed the workplace ban because he believes that is a matter that should be up to local officials to decide. Democratic Rep. Jennifer Shilling was leery of the proposals because she didn't want to hurt business.

But Dr. Todd Mahr, a child asthma and allergy physician and chairman of the Smokefree Air for Everyone Coalition in La Crosse County, called the proposals "amazing."

"At last, we're talking about a workplace safety law," he said.

It's unclear how the proposals will fare, because it is a dramatic attempt to pass anti-smoking legislation.

The higher tax is clearly justified as a way to combat youth smoking. The workplace ban is so sweeping, however, that it might run into more opposition. Whatever happens on the workplace ban, however, its time is coming. It may not be this year, but historical trends are clearly behind it. If not now, it will happen soon.

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