

Snuffing out smoking?

Gov. Jim Doyle and a pack of **anti-smoking** groups are lining up to snuff out a nasty habit.

Recently, Doyle unveiled a proposal to ban smoking in all public places, including bars, restaurants and workplaces.

Some 19 states nationwide have smoking bans for restaurants. About 13 have bans on **smoking** for bars. The idea is being discussed in numerous other states today.

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Bars and restaurants in these parts have a leg up in the competition for patrons when compared to the Twin Cities. Quite a number of establishments across the river say they've struggled financially as smoking bans have been instituted. Some of those clients have crossed the river to seek out Wisconsin businesses that

allow smokers to light up. That advantage would disappear under the plan.

The **smoking ban** isn't the only controversial language in the proposal.

Doyle also wants the State Legislature to increase the tax on cigarettes by \$1.25. Taxes on a pack of smokes is now 77 cents.

Area convenience stores and other tobacco sellers have also enjoyed a competitive advantage over Minnesota retailers when it comes to the price of cigarettes. Due to higher taxes in Minnesota, many smokers have crossed the river to buy their favorite brands here.

Some convenience store owners claim it's only fair, because many Wisconsin motorists cross the river into Minnesota to buy gas that is cheaper because of lower state taxes.

We believe both ideas are worth pursuing. The societal costs associated with smoking are too great to continue to ignore them.

A ban in bars and restaurants would not only help reduce the smoking habit of those who enjoy cigarettes, it would also reduce the effect of second-hand smoke on non-smoking patrons and employees who work in the establishments.

The benefit of a higher tax on cigarettes would not only discourage young people from picking up the habit, it would also raise added funds to help pay for health costs and **anti-smoking** programs.

Even if the plan doesn't gain enough support this year, we would encourage legislators to continue to pursue plans to reduce **smoking** across Wisconsin.