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Our view: Goodbye to smoke; hello to clean air

While it's disappointing that the proposed compromise delays doing the right thing for more than a year, we applaud the workplace smoking ban and trust the full Senate and Assembly will pass the measure.

It's a close call, but the 15-month wait and a couple of narrow exceptions are worth the lack of complicated phase-ins and the acquiescence of Wisconsin's powerful Tavern League.

While Tavern League President Rob Swearingen worried about the hardship mom- and-pop bar owners might face, the Legislature will do those very small businesses a huge favor when it passes the ban this week.

The ban will put all bars on the same competitive footing at the same time and end the patchwork of local ordinances that exists today.

Despite the fact that opponents took the position that property rights were at issue, that reasoning was flawed and the approach tangential to the real issue.

The real issue is health.

We've long accepted the notion that government has an interest in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces. The evidence of the dangers of second-hand smoke is clear. There's some evidence that even third-hand smoke — the residue left behind on surface that tobacco smoke touches — is a health hazard.

The biggest beneficiaries of this law will be the the hospitality industry employees who will no longer be forced to breathe second-hand smoke.

But we'll all benefit by reducing our exposure to second-hand smoke, and reducing the number of venues for smoking will cut down on the total amount of smoking in the state and, eventually, lower health care costs.

It's instructive to visit Eau Claire or Madison or Appleton, for instance. Believe it or not, people continue to go to bars despite the fact that those communities initiated their own workplace smoking bans.

Given Wisconsin's long history of patronizing — and over-patronizing — taverns, that's one habit we're not going to kick.

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