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STAFF EDITORIAL: Enact smoking ban soon

By:

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Wisconsin has been given a lot of unappealing names recently. It is among the country's fattest states and boasts the highest number of drunk drivers. Wisconsin does not need to add "ashtray of the Midwest" to its repertoire. With the release of yet another report showing the dangerous air quality in Milwaukee, we believe it's time to again take up the issue of a statewide smoking ban.

The Wisconsin State Assembly choked on the issue last year — no pun intended. But with statewide bans in effect in Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa, as well as numerous other states and cities across the country, it is time for Wisconsin to finally move on the issue.

Studies conducted in other smoke-free states have found that smoking bans — particularly those on a statewide level — have no discernible effect on business at bars and taverns. For example, a 2005 case study conducted by the non-profit Americans for Nonsmokers Rights found that both statewide and city-only smoking bans had either no economic impact or a positive economic impact once the law was in effect. A 2008 study reported in the Bismark Tribune found that smoke-free bars in Bismark, N.D. did more business in the quarter following that city's smoking ban. Revenue increased 7.2 percent at smoke-free bars and restaurants in the first quarter of the 2006 ban, as opposed to 3.2 percent in the previous quarter.

More than 30 states have enacted smoking bans and some have included provisions allowing establishments that make most of their money from liquor sales to be exempt from the ban. In Pennsylvania, bars and restaurants may apply for exemptions from the 2009 ban if less than 20 percent of their revenue is generated from food.

City officials have expressed reluctance to establish a smoking ban in the City of Milwaukee, arguing that it would hurt the local economy by encouraging smoking residents to take their business to one of the many nearby suburbs. While the aforementioned Americans for Nonsmokers Rights study highlights a lack of evidence to support this fear, we understand the city's hesitance to do anything that might discourage business in the current economic state. The ban would be more effective and receive more support if legislated at the state level.

Each person has the right to choose to smoke. We do not support denying anyone that right. What we do support is a ban on forcing non-smokers to inhale the toxins via second-hand smoke. The hazards of smoking and, more concerning, of second-hand smoke inhalation have been well documented. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the notion that we would all lead healthier lives if smoking was limited to well-

ventilated, outdoor areas.

In the absence of a smoking ban, Marquette should increase its enforcement of the "20-foot rule." The chalked lines that were drawn a few months ago seemed to remind smokers to respect the right of other students to walk out of their residence or class sans the cloud of smoke. But with the lines washed off and all of the cold weather, students that smoke seem to gather closer and closer to the door. We would appreciate if Marquette would paint the lines on the pavement, or maybe ask DPS to remind students if they see them breaking this rule.

It is time for change. Before Wisconsin is again tagged as the region's ashtray — or worse, as the country's lung cancer capital — let's do something about it. Let's pass a statewide smoking ban this year and all breathe a little easier.

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