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Gov. Doyle signs smoking ban legislation into law

Law goes into effect July 5, 2010; tribal casinos exempt

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Between visits to Milwaukee and Madison, Gov. Jim Doyle stopped by Tiletown Brewing Co. in Green Bay on Monday to sign Wisconsin's smoking ban into law before a packed room of health professionals and other advocates.

"This has been a great moment, I believe, for Wisconsin Legislature," he said at Tiletown, 200 Dousman St. "We have seen Democrats and Republicans come together and to do something to help out the people of this state."

The Tavern League ultimately signed off on the ban, largely because it won't take effect until July 5, 2010. And even then, smoking would be allowed in outdoor seating areas.

But for most bars, restaurants and other workplaces, smoking will be prohibited starting that Monday, though Doyle said he wished it were sooner than next summer. Chris Jenquin of Green Bay said he will be glad to see Green Bay go smoke free.

"I know that when I do go out, I come home smelling like smoke, like an ashtray," he said. "I really don't care for that."

Anti-smoking advocates, including the American Cancer Society, struggled for years to find enough support in the Legislature to enact a ban. Supporters argued it was needed to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke.

Tony Vanderbloemon, of Green Bay, watched his father die of lung cancer after working most of his life in a bar where smoking was permitted. He said he's thankful future generations won't have the same risks.

"I think people will live longer and business will flourish," he said.

Opponents of previous efforts for a statewide ban, including the Tavern League, have voiced concerns over the economic impact on the state's bars. They worried that barring smoking would drive away business.

Andrew Ballman of Green Bay protested outside Tiletown on Monday.

"Jim Doyle wants it both ways," he said. "He wants my money every time I buy cigarettes, and he wants to tell me I can't smoke them anywhere, and that sucks."

As more communities enacted bans, nonsmoking bars more frequently were pitted against nearby bars where smoking was allowed.

There were 37 such local bans in effect, including in Madison, Appleton and Eau Claire, by the time the Legislature last week passed the statewide law.

Under the law, the local bans remain in effect until the state one starts, but local governments would not be allowed to pass stricter regulations.

Tribal casinos and existing cigar bars and specialty tobacco shops will not be subject to the ban. Hotels could no longer offer rooms for smoking.

Violators would face fines of up to \$250. Business owners who don't try to stop smokers would get a warning and then a \$100 fine for subsequent violations.

Doyle said the ban will save the state money in health-care costs, improve public health and save lives.

Twenty-two states, including Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota, already ban smoking in bars, restaurants and workplaces. Four more states — Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota and Virginia — will do so by the end of the year.
