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Decker: Smoking ban will pass

By DJ Slater

For the Marshfield News-Herald

State Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, is confident the state's proposed smoking ban will pass through all legislative bodies without much friction.

"There will be some people opposed to it, but I think they'll pass it," Decker said. "When legislators (both Democrat and Republican) say they are on board, that basically sets the path for passing."

State lawmakers reached a compromise Wednesday with smoking advocates regarding a statewide ban that would prohibit smoking at nearly all Wisconsin workplaces starting on July 5, 2010.

The plan would replace the patchwork of local ordinances restricting smoking that have been passed in dozens of communities across the state, including Marshfield's ban on smoking in all workplaces.

Wisconsin would be the 26th state to ban smoking in all bars and restaurants, advocates say. Three of its neighboring states -- Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota -- have already approved bans.

The bill first will go through a Senate committee and Assembly committee, which both are expected to cast separate votes at 10 a.m. today to move it forward. If successful, the bill will go to both legislative houses on Wednesday. Gov. Jim Doyle then would have to sign the bill into law.

"I am pleased that an agreement has been reached in response to my call for a statewide smoking ban," Doyle said in a statement. "I wish the ban would be implemented sooner, but today we are one step closer to a statewide smoking ban that is fair and equitable."

Smokers who violate the ban would be fined between \$100 and \$250. Bar owners would not be fined as long as they take steps to prevent smoking in their establishments such as posting signs and telling customers to stop. Owners caught not enforcing the ban would be warned the first time and fined up to \$100 for a second offense.
