

# RIVER FALLS JOURNAL

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*Democracy is misinterpreted to mean rule by parties, by conflicting ideologies, in which theories and principles replace men. The people vote for men, but the men they vote for are merely representatives and servants of dogmas.*

—Wei Wu Wei

## **Hurray! Thinking outside the box**

The above quote is by Irishman Terence Gray, a 20th century Taoist philosopher, who kept his anonymity by using the pen name Wei Wu Wei. His comments about our cherished form of government ring true. Recall all the divisive, partisan politics of our two-party system.

Nowhere was this more evident than last summer when dogmatic Republicans and Democrats wouldn't compromise and held the state budget hostage. The standoff left the budget months overdue and cost thousands of dollars to school districts like River Falls.

We've already touched on that failure in a past editorial. Now we turn to a success story: State Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls, who's come out strongly in support of a statewide smoking ban in public places.

On this issue progressive-minded Wisconsin lags. Neighboring states, including Minnesota and Illinois, have such bans. Even nations like France have them. With soaring health-care costs and overwhelming data on how smoking and secondhand smoke add to the crisis, it seems the time to act politically is now.

Gov. Jim Doyle, a Democrat, was in Hudson last month, touting an indoor statewide smoking ban. If such a ban doesn't pass, Doyle says Wisconsin will become the "ashtray of the Midwest." A Pierce County official adds that more Minnesotans are getting busted for drunk driving as they cross the border to light up in Wisconsin bars.

Last week in New Richmond, Harsdorf spoke before a smoke-free rally at Ready Randy's Sports Bar & Grill, a profitable, smoke-free establishment. Harsdorf explained how her outlook came to transcend ideology.

Among her quotes: "This is not a party-line issue...When you get right down to it, it's a health-care issue...I'm getting more and more people coming up saying they want to go the smoke-free route...It doesn't just affect the person smoking."

Harsdorf admitted her decision was hard because of her party's reluctance to intrude in private business. But she said health perils and the \$167-billion annual economic drain linked to smoking were impossible to ignore.

Interestingly, we now have Senate Democrats stonewalling. Sen. Roger Breske, D-Eland, is a former bar owner and president of the Wisconsin Tavern League. Guess where his loyalties lie? The 69-year-old Breske dismissed scientific evidence about the harm of secondhand smoke with this laughable quip: "It's hogwash...I'm still alive."

Rigid ideology is party blind and extends to special-interest cronyism — another mark against modern democracies. Wei Wu Wei went on say: "If power is delegated it should be exercised by a living man and not by the representative of a dead dogma."

Sexist language aside, Harsdorf's smoking ban support shows that a "living" politician with an unfettered mind can make sound public policy decisions. All living, breathing lawmakers of both parties should take note.

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