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Floor it to pass smoking ban

A Wisconsin State Journal editorial
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Borrowing a line from the theme song to the old Burt Reynolds ' movie "Smokey and the Bandit, " Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch keeps saying that a statewide smoking ban in Wisconsin has "a long way to go and a short time to get there. "

Well, there 's another line from that popular '70s theme song that Huebsch should focus on instead: "Put your foot hard on the pedal. Son, never mind them brakes. "

Huebsch, R-West Salem, and Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, need to floor it so the statewide smoking ban gets floor votes in both houses of the Legislature before lawmakers adjourn this spring.

A statewide smoking ban in bars and restaurants appears to have the votes needed for passage, Gov. Jim Doyle told the State Journal editorial board Friday.

Let 's see if he 's right.

Lawmakers should have to go on record with their support or opposition before facing re-election this fall.

Judging from the bipartisan enthusiasm Doyle got in calling for quick action on the smoking ban in his State of the State address last week, support is strong.

Most Democrats gave the smoking ban a standing ovation. Yet key Democrats such as Sen. Roger Breske of Eland have so far blocked the bill 's path to the Senate floor.

Many Republican lawmakers applauded the smoking ban during Doyle 's speech. Yet the ban hasn 't had even a public hearing in the GOP-run Assembly.

Illinois recently banned smoking in bars and restaurants. Minnesota has, too.

More significantly, dozens of municipalities in Wisconsin have adopted local smoking bans.

"The patchwork approach to public health is bad for business, and the time for action is now, " the governor declared during his speech.

Doyle is right.

A local smoking ban in Madison hurt some bars on the edges of the city when it first kicked in. That 's because nearby bars just beyond city limits continued to allow smoking and pulled away smoking customers.

But across most of Madison, the bars have done just fine smoke-free. And waitresses and bartenders, in particular, can finally enjoy healthy work environments. Non-smoking customers are particularly happy. Some smoke-free bars in Madison even cater to smokers by offering outdoor patios equipped with heaters.

The Madison smoking ban has worked far better than expected. It will work well for the rest of Wisconsin, too.

But for that to happen, Huebsch and Decker need to "put the hammer down. "

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