

Statement of Ald. Bob Donovan
January 26, 2007

I am very disappointed in Governor Jim Doyle's two-pronged attack on the thousands of Milwaukeeans and state residents who smoke.

The Governor's proposed hike in the cigarette tax is blatantly unfair and is basically an attempt to raise state budget revenue through an absurdly high tax increase that narrowly targets a specific group of citizens. In my district there are dozens of small corner taverns – many of which have been in operation since long before I was born – and the Governor's proposed statewide ban on smoking in all public places and buildings would be a huge blow to the hard-working families that own these small but vital businesses.

If smoking is and has been such a big public health issue in Wisconsin, then what has taken the Governor so long to bring this proposal forward, and why didn't he raise it prior to the election in November? Also, U.S. health care costs have skyrocketed in the past 10 to 20 years despite the fact that the number of smokers has plummeted. To suggest that a statewide smoking ban and an egregious tax increase supposedly designed to get more people to quit will somehow reduce health care costs is, I believe, an erroneous assumption.

Lastly, I plan on organizing rallies in the approaching days and weeks in order to energize Milwaukeeans and others who are angry not only because of the Governor's two-pronged attack, but also because they feel like somehow someone has decided that it's OK to step all over smokers. Also I find it ridiculous that the Governor is championing this effort while street violence is tearing Milwaukee apart. Where has he been on that issue? Also, where has the Governor been on the sky-high drop out rate at MPS, or on the violence in our schools? Where has he been on our shamefully high teen pregnancy rate? What has he done about our freeze in state shared revenue, which translates into vacancies we can't fill in our police department and which robs us of dollars that we could use to pay for so many other services?

The 2005 effort to ban smoking here was not successful, and I'm planning to do all I can to make sure the Governor's unfair effort meets the same fate.

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