

Legislators push anti-smoking bills

One would tighten rules for indoors

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Madison, Wis. — The Legislature moved against smoking on two fronts Tuesday.

The Assembly passed a bill banning smoking by people under age 18. At the same time, the Senate voted to extend the state's ban on indoor smoking to private offices.

Neither action is final. The bill banning smoking by young people (A-390) must still go to the Senate for action, while the indoor smoking bill (S-358) must go to the Assembly for final legislative approval. After that, the bills would go to Gov. Thompson for signing.

The anti-smoking bill passed by the Senate removes some big exceptions to Wisconsin's present indoor smoking law, which was enacted in 1984. Current law establishes a presumption that smoking is prohibited in most buildings open to the public, but exempts private offices. The bill passed Tuesday extends the law to private offices.

Current law allows building owners or managers to designate rooms and even entire buildings as areas in which smoking is permissible. The bill eliminates the entire-building option and allows a room to be designated as a smoking area only if it is occupied regularly or used exclusively by smokers.

Current law exempts prisons and jails. The bill prohibits smoking in correctional facilities generally, but allows jail or prison authorities to designate some areas for smoking.

The bill also sets a \$25 non-criminal penalty for smoking in a prohibited area. The existing law imposes no penalty.

Another provision of the bill allows the State Justice Department to enforce the law. Under current law, enforcement is up to local authorities.

Enactment of the bill "will assure our citizens of a healthier work environment," said Sen. Fred Risser (D-Madison), its sponsor.

Passage came without a roll call, allowing senators to avoid going on record on a bill that's sure to upset constituents who smoke. The Senate passed the bill on a voice vote after an attempt to detour it to committee failed on a vote of 20-11.

The Assembly passed the bill banning smoking by minors on a vote of 95-2. Under the bill, Wisconsin would join 41 other states in banning the sale of tobacco products to minors.

The measure passed only after a protracted debate on an amendment that called for a permanent ban on the sale of tobacco products for anyone born after last Dec. 31.

"This product is a scourge on society and you all know it," said Rep. Martin Schneider (D-Wisconsin Rapids), the amendment's author.

"This is a right-to-life vote," he said. "This is a right to a good life with clean air, clean lungs."

Under his plan, those born after

the end of last year would be forever banned from smoking in Wisconsin.

Rep. Barbara Gronemus (D-Whitehall) objected, saying it would infringe on freedom of choice to smoke or chew tobacco. She noted that her legislative district included a number of tobacco farmers.

But the Assembly voted to set aside Schneider's amendment on a 62-35 vote in favor of passing the less stringent tobacco restrictions.

The measure that did pass was a compromise worked out with the tobacco industry, the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association.

In addition to a statewide ban on the sale of tobacco products to minors, the bill would:

- Ban free distribution of tobacco products to minors.

- Ban cigaret vending machines from being placed within 500 feet of schools.

- Require retailers to post notices of the 18-year-old minimum age for purchase of tobacco products.

The Assembly also passed a bill (A-621) that would require the State Elections Board to set aside 3% of the money it collects for public financing of elections for publicizing the program.

The bill passed on a voice vote. But Assembly Republican Leader Betty Jo Nelsen of Shorewood first argued that lawmakers should instead approve a separate appropriation for promotion of public financing of elections.

Democrats chided her for that suggestion, saying her real motive was to kill public financing of elections because Republicans generally get more money in private contributions.

"They know if they can put the nail in the coffin of public financing, it is just going to fatten the hogs up there," Rep. Stanley Gruszynski (D-Stevens Point) said, gesturing to the area of the chamber where the Assembly Republicans sit.

Nelsen said the only reason she wanted the separate appropriation was so that the public would understand how the public campaign money was being used.

The 3% for promotion would come to about \$13,500 of the total \$445,000 available for public financing of elections. The money would be used to promote having state income taxpayers voluntarily indicate on their tax forms a desire to contribute to the public campaign financing fund.

The promotion scheme was suggested because of steadily declining revenues from the voluntary taxpayer contributions since 1960.

The promotions presumably would result in eventually increasing the size of the campaign fund.

Proponents of the measure said public financing was important to prevent special-interest groups from unduly influencing elections.

The Assembly also passed, 85-11, a bill (S-161) that would designate milk as the official state beverage. The bill previously was passed by the Senate. It now goes to the governor.