



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Wisconsin Restaurant Association Supports
Statewide Smoking Ban with No Exemptions**

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association Board of Directors voted recently to support a statewide workplace smoking ban that does not exempt bars or bar areas in restaurants.

The Association has always defended a business owner's right to make their own decisions. However, the current patchwork of local smoking bans is a problem for the restaurant industry as it puts hundreds of restaurants at an unfair disadvantage.

There are 30 local smoking ban ordinances in Wisconsin. As a result, there are hundreds of restaurants in the situation where they may lose customers to restaurants just outside the smoking ban area or to taverns who may be exempt from a smoking ban ordinance.

When it comes to regulation of smoking, the Wisconsin Restaurant Association's goal has always been to achieve a level playing field for everyone in the foodservice industry.

"There are only two paths to a level playing field on smoking," said Ed Lump, President and CEO of WRA. "One is no regulation, and the other is a complete ban. Anything in between unfairly creates winners and losers, with government regulations determining which businesses survive and which flounder."

"Given the proliferation of local ordinances in the state of Wisconsin, WRA's Board of Directors has voted to support a workplace smoking ban," according to Lump. "We feel that this is the only way to create a fair competitive environment for all eating and drinking establishments in Wisconsin. In his 'State of the State' address, Gov. Doyle raised the stakes with his push for a total workplace smoking ban. WRA will of course need to look at the details of what is proposed when a bill is drafted."

"The WRA Board vote was 36-1, but it was not an easy decision to make," said Lump. "The Board of Directors struggled with this issue but ultimately decided

that a statewide smoking ban was going to be the best option for the foodservice industry in Wisconsin."

WRA will not support a statewide workplace smoking ban that exempts bars or bar areas of restaurants. The problem with exempting bars from a smoking ban (often defined as having more than 50% of sales from alcohol) is that this puts restaurants at a distinct disadvantage compared to bars that may serve a lot of food and can still allow smoking.

"Many of our board members are bar owners, and voted that the Association should support a statewide workplace smoking ban with no exemption for bars or bar areas," according to Lump. "More and more WRA members see a statewide ban as the only way to level the playing field."

"When Madison banned smoking in my bar in 2005, I was angry," said John Kavanaugh, owner of the Esquire Club in Madison. "My bar business went down because my smoking customers drove out to Westport. But, I've also seen an increase in dining customers and I believe my smoking customers will come back for my steaks when they can no longer smoke at other restaurants or bars."

The number of restaurants in Wisconsin that have gone non-smoking on their own has steadily increased for the last 20 years. Many have reduced their smoking sections to only a few tables or eliminated smoking in their dining areas altogether. Others have completely banned smoking already.

"Due to personal health, I made the decision to ban smoking in my establishment in 1995," said Ada Lara Thimke, owner of Lara's Tortilla Flats in Oshkosh. "I was worried it would affect my business adversely, but instead I saw an increase in business. In the 32 years of being in business, it was the best decision I have ever made."

WRA remains staunchly opposed to local smoking bans, and will continue to fight in that arena. Given the trend of local smoking bans being enacted throughout the state, a statewide ban is the only way to have a competitive environment where one business doesn't have an unfair advantage over another.

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Since 1933, the Wisconsin Restaurant Association has been dedicated to the promotion, protection and improvement of the foodservice industry. The Wisconsin Restaurant Education Foundation's mission is to promote food service as a professional career path; attract and educate future industry leaders; and provide quality training for those already working in the industry.