

LABOR TIMES – REP. TOD OHNSTAD

I have good news and I have bad news. Brighter days are ahead, but we are not there yet. This month we saw the election of the next President of the United States and the announcement that an effective Covid-19 vaccine will be available in the coming months. This is all welcomed news as so much of the past year has been consumed by presidential politics and the dual health and economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nonetheless, public health officials warn of the already concerning current level of virus transmission and hospitalizations as we enter the looming cold weather and flu season that could exasperate the spread, and the new president does not take office until January.

After receiving more votes than any presidential ticket ever and a sizeable share of the Electoral College, on November 3rd Americans elected Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as the next president and vice president of our nation. Despite false claims of voter fraud by some, no credible claims of material malfeasance or errors have been verified by election officials or courts. Running a free, fair, open, and safe election was not easy during a pandemic, and I thank the many election officials and volunteers in Kenosha and across the country for the planning and effort that went in to making this process a success.

Democrats maintained the majority in the House and two competitive runoff elections in Georgia will determine control of the US Senate, but we now look forward to a calmer, fairer, and more thoughtful approach from our top leaders as American families continue to grapple with the difficulties of making ends meet and day-to-day life in the midst of a pandemic.

In Wisconsin, gerrymandered maps provided a mixed bag for the legislature, as Assembly Democrats picked up two additional seats in Milwaukee suburbs, but Senate Democrats were unable to defend two districts. Nonetheless, the Republican's goal to achieve a supermajority that would allow them to override the governor's veto was not successful, and legislative districts will be redrawn in the coming session.

As we move past the election, we still must deal with the virus. I was heartened by the Pfizer announcement of such an apparently successful vaccine. However, the entire country, and in many ways Wisconsin in particular, is at the brink of crisis as our hospitals struggle to keep up. Our ever-record-breaking levels of new cases

shows that too many have not taken guidance seriously and the Republican-controlled legislature and conservative courts have provided an effective tag team in ensuring our Department of Health Services cannot implement the needed restrictions other states have been able to use.

Vaccines are on pace to come when warmer weather returns, but public health officials paint a grim picture if more of us do not temporarily make better choices. While the idea may have once been inconceivable, on the guidance of these officials, many families are reworking how they will approach the holidays. The next phase of our response relies on all of us working together to protect life in the short term so that we can get back to our traditional way of life in the long term. Wear a mask, wash, stay distanced, and when you can, just stay home. Together we must work through what is hopefully the ninth inning of this pandemic and get on to the way forward.

With an eye toward the future, this week I met with Governor Evers to discuss my suggestions and requests for the upcoming state budget. Governor Evers knows our city, our delegation, and our local leaders well. He seemed very receptive as I advocated on the investments we need, the challenges we face, and the innovative approaches we are pursuing. The next budget process will not be easy given the many needs presented as a result of the pandemic. I am hopeful Congress will recognize the urgency and provide additional relief and that GOP legislators can partner with our governor to find common ground.