

REP. REPORT DECEMBER 2020

Alright everyone, it is time for a huddle. It is crunch time, and we're going to need to work together as a team to win this one. Much like the final games of the football season, it is crunch time for our response to the current pandemic and how we overcome the associated health and economic consequences. Vaccines and the promise of a return to our traditional way of life appear to be just around the corner, but we're still in the fourth quarter of the game, at the end of what has proven to be a difficult year.

This week the Food and Drug Administration provided authorization for the use of the first Covid-19 vaccine. While the first batches of the Pfizer vaccine will soon be provided to critical healthcare workers and vulnerable nursing home residents, experts suggest it will not be until the spring or summer until production can ramp up to provide inoculations to the general public. This means we will need to continue to adhere to suggested public health practices for the months to come as we build immunities in our communities.

While further guidance and decisions on how vaccines will be distributed are still being determined at both the federal and state levels, I have been impressed by the level of consideration that has been put into these questions by the top medical experts and healthcare leaders as I have listened to briefings and after reviewing the state's plan.

This week I joined with Senator Wirch and Representative McGuire to announce legislation we have developed on behalf of Pfizer to clear a potential legal hurdle as they prepare to use their Pleasant Prairie facility as one of a few hubs for distribution throughout the country. In short, due to laws in other states and a flaw in a federal regulation, there is a concern that Pfizer would be unable to deliver the kit that goes with the vaccine into other states unless the company was licensed by our state to do so, which the legislation accomplishes. This joins other critical proposals related to the pandemic response the legislature should be actively and urgently considering. Unfortunately, the Republican majority in the legislature have said they will not return to take up these proposals until the next session, despite not acting on any legislation since April.

While action on legislation has not occurred, the work of state government continues. Earlier this month, Representative McGuire and I received a briefing as members of the Ways and Means Committee from Revenue Secretary Peter Barca and Legislative Fiscal Bureau Director Bob Lang on the state's finances and budget picture, as well as the general economic condition of the state. While the pandemic has clearly impacted the economy, perhaps the primary takeaway was that the federal resources provided by the CARES Act has been the lifeline that has prevented a broader economic collapse. Without question, the coronavirus has been devastating on those who have been out of work or struggled to keep their business open, but the infusion of direct assistance and other protections offered in the federal bill have largely kept things afloat for now.

Unfortunately, like in Madison, Congress has not acted on subsequent Covid-19 legislation since this spring and now the funds have been expended and the protections will disappear in the new year. Nonetheless, the need for this assistance will still remain. On a positive note, congressional negotiations continue and there is still hope that another assistance package could be approved before January.

While congressional action is important and needed, many Wisconsin families are likely spending more time this December thinking about the holidays and how cherished traditions will look this year due to coronavirus concerns. In order to keep everyone healthy, families are reworking how they will approach the holidays, like hosting Hanukah over Zoom. Without a doubt, celebrating the Christmas season without the gatherings we have become accustomed to can be difficult to imagine, but the guidance from our top health professionals is clear. Wear a mask, wash, stay distanced, and when you can, just stay home. We have vaccines on the way, but we don't have them yet. The more we can keep each other healthy in the near future will give us all the more to celebrate when this is behind us.