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A Look Back on My First Year as Your State Senator

This time last year, I was preparing to step into my new role as the State Senator for the 14th Senate District. I can say it has been as rewarding of an experience as I expected, and I am so thankful for all the support and encouragement along the way.

I started off 2021 by joining my Joint Committee on Finance colleagues in crafting and passing a responsible state budget. That budget provides a \$3.4 billion tax cut and includes significant investments in important industries such as healthcare, tourism, transportation and long-term care. Building off the work from the budget and issues brought to my office by constituents, I was able to get 11 bills signed into law. These new laws will help Wisconsinites live, work and go to school safely in our communities and increase opportunities for economic prosperity without creating overreaching government regulations.

A few highlights of important measures my office has helped lead include:

Agriculture and Agribusiness

- Creating a new meat processing program that helps facilities expand and innovate. This is especially important following the strain put on this industry throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Providing additional funds for the producer-led watershed protection grants and county conservation staffing grants. These programs provide an avenue for farmers to share and implement best practices when it relates to Wisconsin's soil and water quality.
- Creating a comprehensive agriculture export program which is a partnership between the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. This legislation funds and creates export goals that are to be met by 2026.

Local Government

- Providing a more reasonable fee for local towns and villages who submit their annual reports for general transportation aids late. There are local municipalities in the district that were getting large fines for instances beyond their control like computer software errors. This new law still incentivizes providing reports on time without devastating their already tight budgets.

- Supporting the accurate remittance of room tax collections to the correct municipalities. It resolves an issue where room tax was transmitted by zip code, and municipalities that shared zip codes did not know what amount of tax they should receive.

Public Safety

- Transitioning the Wisconsin Structural Collapse team into an Urban Search and Rescue Team which allows members to respond to a wider variety of incidents including swift water, high and low angle and rope rescues.
- Creating an “emergency or roadside response area” that doubles fines for certain traffic violations, bans the use of cellphones and creates a new penalty if an accident results in bodily harm when our first responders are responding to an emergency on our roadways.

Education

- Providing temporary flexibility to school districts for the 2021-22 school year to offer a virtual option through open enrollment to non-resident students. This provided families with additional options when deciding what works best for their families in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Increasing opportunity for students to submit applications for full-time open enrollment by not counting applications for a virtual charter school against their three application limit. Students can be denied open enrollment for various reasons including expulsion, truancy, lack of space in the school or the need for individualized services that are not available at that school.
- Adding information about the state’s Safe Haven law to human growth and development courses if the school district chooses to offer that curriculum. The Safe Haven law allows parents to safely relinquish their child to law enforcement, emergency responders or hospital staff without legal consequence, so long as the child is under 72 hours old. This provides young parents another option to consider when emotions are high.

Serving as your state senator is an honor, and as always, I encourage you to reach out to my office with any questions, concerns or issues relating to state government. I look forward to an equally productive 2022. Happy New Year!

To reach Sen. Ballweg with questions or comments please call (608) 266-0751 or email Sen.Ballweg@legis.wi.gov. Visit her website, legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/14/ballweg, to subscribe to her weekly e-update.

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