



Contact: Senator Joan Ballweg

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Column: Senator Ballweg's Year in Review

2023 has been an exciting year in the 14th Senate District and at the Wisconsin State Capitol. I have really enjoyed the opportunity to continue serving as your State Senator and I look forward to continuing this work in the New Year.

This session, I again chair the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism. I serve as a member of the Joint Committee on Finance, the Wisconsin State Building Commission, the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue and the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families. I also serve as the Vice-Chair for the Senate Republican Caucus and as a member of the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board.

January of the odd numbered years always starts with excitement at the Capitol! January 3 was inauguration day as all 99 members of the Wisconsin State Assembly, 17 members of the Wisconsin State Senate and the state's constitutional officers were sworn into office. On January 24, the governor gave his annual State of the State Address to Wisconsinites, the state Assembly, the state Senate, the state Supreme Court and the constitutional officers.

February kicked off the state budget season with the governor's biennial budget address where he outlined his priorities for the next biennial budget. As a member of the Joint Committee on Finance, I have the opportunity to work directly with other legislators and non-partisan staff to understand the governor's proposal and work to create a budget that invests in Wisconsinites and leaves the state in excellent fiscal shape.

In March, we all enjoyed watching the Wisconsin Badger Men's Basketball team make a great run in the National Invitational Tournament. March had its own 'madness' at the Capitol. I attended several meetings in preparation for the state budget and met with my colleagues on the Wisconsin State Building Commission to learn about upcoming projects. The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism also held public hearings on individual pieces of legislation and acted on the appointment of gubernatorial appointees. Notably, the committee and the Wisconsin State Senate approved the appointments of the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

During the month of April we really dug into the work of the 2023-25 Wisconsin State Budget. The Joint Committee on Finance held public hearings on the proposed budget in Waukesha, Wisconsin Dells, Eau Claire and Minocqua.

I started the month of May off with a tour of Camp Randall, this was a fun experience. I enjoyed getting to see the facility and learning more about their project request that needed building commission approval. The Joint Committee on Finance also began voting on individual sections of the state budget on May 2. The committee continued meeting on specific agency budget proposals throughout the month of May. On May 8, the governor signed my first bill of the 2023-24 Legislative Session. 2023 Wisconsin Act 7 allows the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to update their practices by repealing out-of-date statutes. I continued my investment in area youth with my Joan Ballweg Leadership Scholarship for graduating high school seniors. Another 12 students of the 14th district received the awards.

The work of the Joint Committee on Finance continued throughout June. The committee held executive sessions two times each week until each agency budget had been approved by the committee. On June 28, the Wisconsin State Senate passed the 2023-25 Wisconsin State Budget.

On July 6, the Governor signed the 2023-25 Wisconsin State Budget. The budget, crafted by the Joint Committee on Finance, placed the state on solid financial footing for the next two years. I am especially excited about the provisions in the budget that allow for the completion of projects in the 14th Senate District. The projects include water quality studies required by the Department of Natural Resources for Buffalo Lake and the enumeration for the Montello/Fox River Lock Channel repairs. I enjoy serving as a member of the Joint Committee of Finance and look forward to work on the budget in the next biennium. I am disappointed the governor vetoed the middle income tax cuts presented to him in the budget.

In August, my second bill of the 2023-24 Legislative session was signed into law. 2023 Wisconsin Act 32 makes updates to the membership of county land conservation committees. This bill was widely supported by agricultural groups in the state, and I enjoyed working on this commonsense reform. Perhaps the most exciting day as a member of the State Building Commission is the annual meeting at the Wisconsin State Fair. This year, the commission visited the State Fair on August 9 and approved \$340 million in funds for the completion of building projects across the state and included state funding for a remodeled Cream Puff Pavilion.

September was the kickoff of the fall legislative session. On September 14, the Wisconsin State Senate passed legislation I've worked on for three sessions. If enacted, this legislation will expand postpartum Medicaid coverage to mothers for up to a year after they give birth. I am passionate about this legislation because it is important that new moms are healthy so they can care for their babies. In September, I also attended several Annual County Farm Bureau Meetings, Towns Association Meetings and I was honored to speak at the City of Portage's September 11, 2001 remembrance.

This October committee work at the Capitol really picked up again. I testified at public hearings in support of several bills I have authored, and attended committee meetings for the committees of which I am a member. On October 17, I had three bills pass the Wisconsin State Senate.

In November we honor our veterans and I was happy to be part of a wonderful program held by the Princeton School District in cooperation with the Princeton VFW and American Legion posts. It is also another very busy month around the Capitol. The legislature was busy with committee meetings and floor sessions passing meaningful legislative reforms that will benefit Wisconsin's families and businesses. On November 7, I had several bills pass the Wisconsin State Senate. Six of these bills were a product of the Legislative Council Study Committee on Uniform Death Reporting Standards, which I chaired over the summer of 2022. In November, I also had the opportunity to visit with fourth grade classes in the 14th Senate District and talk to them about government, Wisconsin history, state symbols and my work as their State Senator.

Just like the other months of the year, December started off with excitement. On December 6, the Governor signed six of my bills into law. These bills make improvements to the financial aid system for students pursuing a higher education degree. One of the bills, 2023 Wisconsin Act 79, allows for the use of newborn infant safety devices, also called baby boxes. These boxes add to Wisconsin's existing Safe Haven law and allow mothers who are unwilling or unable to care for their infant the ability to anonymously surrender them in a safe, temperature controlled, alarm equipped box at a fire station, police department or hospital.

Like many of you, I am looking forward to ending the year by celebrating Christmas and the New Year with my family. I look forward to the opportunity to continue serving as your Wisconsin State Senator in 2024. Have a safe and happy holiday season and a very Merry Christmas.

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