

January 6, 2023



Dear friends,

I think we say this every year, but can you believe it is 2023? I'm feeling excited and hopeful for the year ahead. The days are getting longer, and warmer weather is on its way. Some big things have already happened in the new year, as you can read about further down my e-update.

Until next time, stay safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Bob

small business **SPOTLIGHT**



BLAK Coffee Pop-Up Celebrates First Anniversary, New Location Opened Downtown Kenosha

Just more than a year ago, Deshaun Foster opened a pop-up coffee shop at the Regimen Barber Collective, 1345 52nd St. in Kenosha. It was an immediate hit. Now, Foster has expanded with BLAK Coffee Kenosha Downtown, 5615 7th Ave. The Downtown location will hold its Grand Opening on February 1 beginning at 7:30 am. In the meantime, BLAK still operates a pop-up location, now at the Kenosha Creative Space, 624 7th Ave., every Saturday from 8 am to 2 pm.

Find more at <https://www.facebook.com/BlakCoffeeKenosha/>.

In Case You Missed It



Evers Sworn in for New Term, Legislature Begins 2023 Session

Tuesday, January 3 was a big day at the State Capitol, as Governor Tony Evers and Attorney General Josh Kaul were sworn in for new four-year terms and new Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez took the oath of office for the first time. Members of the State Legislature who were either elected or re-elected in the November elections were also sworn in to begin the 2023-2024 legislative session.

I was delighted to be visited by a number of folks from both Kenosha and Racine who were in town to be part of the historic day. If you are ever in town, stop by my office, 127 South, and say hello! If you call ahead (608-267-8979), we may be able to arrange a private tour for you.



Committees I'll Serve on This Session

The start of a new legislative session is always exciting, full of hope and possibilities. I'm ready to get to work and have been appointed to serve on several important and relevant committees. My Senate committees for this session are: the Senate Committee on Housing, Rural Issues and Forestry; the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs; the Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution & Federalism; and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Energy. I've also been chosen to serve as the Senate Democrat's representative on the State of Wisconsin Building Commission. These committees will give me the opportunity to continue my work on labor, conservation and natural resources, veterans' issues, homelessness, and other important areas.



Twenty-Three States Increase Minimum Wage to Start 2023; Wisconsin isn't One of Them

A new year means higher minimum wages in 23 states, leading to increased pay for an estimated 8.4 million American workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute. The rate hikes come because of either legislation, ballot measures or inflation. Unfortunately for Wisconsin workers, this means that fall even farther behind their counterparts in other states, as our minimum wage remains shamefully low at \$7.25, the floor set by the federal government, where it has been since 2009. Neighboring states Illinois (from \$12 per hour up to \$13),

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Michigan (from \$9.87 per hour up to \$10.10, with legislation passed taking it to \$12.05 by 2030) and Minnesota (from \$10.33 for large employers and \$8.42 for small employers up to \$10.59 and \$8.63, respectively) all increased their minimum wages to start the New Year. I've repeatedly authored legislation for more than a decade to boost the state's minimum wage but have been blocked each time by Republican obstruction. The increasingly large gap between

Wisconsin's minimum wage and those in other states, and the large number of states that institute wage increases each year, throw cold water on Wisconsin Republican and Big Business talking points that increasing the minimum wage will hurt our economy. In fact, it's been so good for business that deep red states like Alaska (from \$10.34 up to \$10.85), Missouri (from \$11.15 up to \$12 per hour), Nebraska (from \$9 per hour up to \$10.50), and South Dakota (from \$9.95 per hour up to \$10.80) already had minimums much higher than ours and still increased theirs. We must increase the pressure on Wisconsin Republicans and tell them it's time to give Wisconsin's working families a raise.



Several Key Pieces of Biden's Inflation Reduction Act Took Effect January 1

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 was a key legislative accomplishment of President Biden and Democrats in Congress. A number of the major components of the law are just not taking effect and could provide tremendous assistance to many of us. First, a new inflation cap that limits how much drug manufacturers can increase the prices of their prescription drugs; additional rules insure people enrolled in the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan won't pay more than \$35 for a month's supply of insulin. Part D enrollees can also now received vaccinations for no charge. Another huge provision of the bill beginning in 2023 is the portion that allows Medicare to negotiate for prescription drug prices. The previous law prohibited Medicare from doing so. These changes are projected to save Medicare almost \$100 billion over the coming decade.



Wisconsin Families Can Get 5 Free Covid Tests Each Month

Wisconsin residents can now get Covid-19 tests sent to them free of charge from the state. The Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services (DHS) says that the [Say Yes! Covid Test website](#) is now live and operational. The site allows households to order five rapid tests for free **each month**.

Households can still get up to eight rapid Covid tests per month through their insurance providers, as well.



Take My Legislative Survey

It's very important to me as a legislator to hear what you think about the important issues of the day. I've put together a survey on a variety of topics that I am hoping you will take the time to complete. You can find an online version of the survey at <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/22/wirch/surveys-and-petitions/2022-legislative-survey>.