

Howard Marklein: 2020 year in review

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 23, 2020

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

This has truly been a unique year. Many of us are probably looking back at 2020 with a mixture of feelings. We're hoping for the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're glad the election cycle is over. We're hoping to connect with family and friends. We're looking for a return to normalcy.

But what will be "normal" in the future? The pandemic gave me the chance to spend a lot of time outside. It helped me to deepen my relationships with family and friends. I slowed down a bit and took time to enjoy things that I had put off because of the usually fast pace of life as your legislator. I am hoping to make some of these refreshing things part of my new normal.

Even with the pandemic, changes to schedules and fewer opportunities to move around the 17th Senate District in person, 2020 was a very productive, fruitful year for me as your State Senator. I am proud of closing the 2019-20 legislative session with 20 bills signed into law by Governor Tony Evers. I was honored to work on a wide array of projects to help communities work with state agencies. I continued to work with the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access. We maintained our pursuit of helping small, local governments to complete the paperwork to receive Federal and State funding for flood damages. My team and I navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and helped secure funds for Farmer Assistance, Broadband, rural communities and more. We assisted more than 500 contacts with unemployment issues. Overall, we fielded and answered 12,599 contacts from constituents since January 1, 2020!

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Governor Evers signed 20 bills I authored into law during the 2019-20 legislative session. I credit these achievements to the great ideas and hard work of the people I serve. Many of the ideas and initiatives I worked on came directly from people, businesses, community leaders and experiences in the 17th Senate District. For example, Act 43 provided a waiver for teachers who are certified out of Wisconsin so that school districts on the borders can hire highly qualified teachers quickly.

Likewise, Act 100 created a Licensing Compact for Physical Therapists to practice across state borders. Act 91 created an exemption for motorized chairlifts at historical churches so that the Jordan Lutheran Church in Green County could provide access to their parishioners. Act 159 streamlined disaster assistance funding and processes for communities suffering from disasters like the Town of Glendale in Monroe County. Act 128 created a property tax exemption to incentivize broadband infrastructure investments. Act 174 changed requirements for agricultural truck drivers to better accommodate the reality of harvest seasons.

In addition to active legislation, we also helped several communities and individuals navigate discussions with state agencies. This was especially unique because most state agency staff are working remotely, creating new challenges for communication. Despite the challenges, Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) and I were able to gather support for additional funding for the repair project for the Elroy-Sparta and 400 Trails, which is beginning. Rep. Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City) and I worked with the City of Lancaster to encourage the Department of Transportation to reconsider their request for access for the new hotel project on Hwy 61. I just received word that this effort was successful! We also are working with the Tri-County Airport, several municipalities and individuals who have needed our help to resolve issues with state government agencies.

The Task Force on Broadband Access continued to meet virtually throughout 2020 to discuss broadband policy. I augmented this discussion with spending a day with the Reedsburg Utility Commission Fiber Construction team who were working in Spring Green as a part of my 12 Hire Howard experiences. I learned all about how fiber optic connections are made and the construction process to connect us. It was fascinating.

The most recent Broadband Expansion Grant application process recently closed and 13 projects in the 17th Senate District are under consideration. I have shared my support for several of them with the Public Service Commission (PSC) and will continue to seek ways to expand broadband into unserved and underserved

communities. We need to be creative to connect our communities.

My team and I also continued to help small, local governments to complete outstanding paperwork so that they can receive all of the Federal and State funding due to them from flood damage in 2018. There are still at least 15 communities who have not received all of the funding they should have received and we are working with them to complete paperwork, make connections and clear obstacles.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked hard to make sure that rural Wisconsin received the assistance, funding and opportunities we needed to manage the crisis. I met with stakeholders, talked with hundreds of businesses and organizations on the phone and via zoom and answered questions for constituents from all corners of the 17th Senate District. My team and I have been working for you full-time throughout the pandemic.

I was proud to work with the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP) right away to make sure farmers and the food supply chain was able to continue to function. I also encouraged the Farm Support grant program and helped spread the word and helped people to apply. I also reached out to the Governor to encourage him to direct some of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to rural broadband – and he did.

As you know, the Safer At Home order for the COVID-19 pandemic created massive unemployment in March, April and May. My team and I worked with more than 500 contacts who did not receive their unemployment efficiently. There are still people who have not received payment months later and we continue to ask the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to finish these cases. According to an audit released this week, 25.5% of claims filed since March 15, 2020 remain unpaid! We will stay on this.

Overall, I am very proud of my work on your behalf in 2020. It has been a very busy, full and unique year as your State Senator. I look forward to our opportunities in 2021.

-Marklein, R-Spring Green, represents the 17th Senate District.