

Kelliann Blazek: Named to head Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's Office of Rural Prosperity

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MADISON, WI. APRIL 14, 2020 – Kelliann Blazek has been named the first director of the newly created Office of Rural Prosperity within the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the organization's secretary and CEO, Missy Hughes, announced today.

"Even as WEDC concentrates on helping the entire state's economy recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to give special attention to our rural communities that were already experiencing huge challenges before the outbreak," said Hughes. "I'm pleased that WEDC was able to find someone with Kelliann's knowledge and commitment to rural development to lead this vital effort."

Governor Tony Evers praised WEDC for continuing the state's commitment to rural communities in Wisconsin, which, like their counterparts in many other states, have been facing declining population and lagging job opportunities in recent years.

"As too many Wisconsinites know firsthand, our farmers and rural areas across our state continue to face challenges, ranging from unproductive trade wars to COVID-19," he said. "We need to be better partners for our farmers, rural communities and agricultural industries, and that starts by making sure that rural prosperity is part of our broader economic development plan. We need to keep working together and listening to the needs of rural Wisconsinites and communities so we can do what's best for our state."

The governor called for creating the Office of Rural Prosperity in his State of the State speech in February to “provide a one-stop shop for folks to navigate state programs and resources tailored to rural communities, businesses and workers.”

Blazek is currently staff counsel for U.S. Rep. Chellie Pingree of Maine, where she oversees a policy portfolio including agriculture, rural development and trade. She has led the Congresswoman’s efforts to reform federal policy to better support the diversity of U.S. agriculture in the annual appropriations process and in the 2018 Farm Bill. Most recently, Blazek developed comprehensive federal legislation focused on climate-smart farming to promote environmental and economic resiliency in agriculture.

Prior to joining Rep. Pingree’s office, Blazek worked on agriculture policy at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Harvard Law School’s Food Law and Policy Clinic. She received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and a master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is also a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Law School and is a licensed attorney in the State Bar of Wisconsin. She grew up on her family’s farm near Bangor, Wisconsin.

“Growing up on a Wisconsin family farm shaped my values in countless ways and fostered a deep appreciation for rural communities,” said Blazek. “Now more than ever, listening to and supporting rural businesses and individuals is essential to addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an honor to lead a new office solely focused on strengthening the rural economy and enhancing the quality of life in rural Wisconsin.”

Blazek will join WEDC on April 20.