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Sen. Marklein: Agriculture and rural issues

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Looking back at the legislative session, I am very proud of the focus and effort that was dedicated to supporting agriculture and rural issues. My fellow rural Wisconsin legislators, including Rep. Travis Tranel (49th District, R-Cuba City), Rep. Tony Kurtz (50th District, R-Wonewoc), Rep. Todd Novak (51st District, Dodgeville) and Rep. Loren Oldenburg (96th District, Viroqua), and I have worked very hard to give a voice to your issues and to advance budget initiatives and legislation that makes a difference for you.

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, milk prices were on the rise and things were looking better for agriculture as a whole. The booming national and international economy, paired with strong trade agreements, boded well for all of us in rural Wisconsin. While we have had to weather the COVID-19 storm and make some adjustments, I still think that things are looking good for rural Wisconsin.

Farmers and rural Wisconsinites are strong. We work together. We get things done.

I am very proud of my work with other rural legislators this session. Among our many accomplishments were significant funding allocations for the intellectual infrastructure of dairy innovation, rural broadband expansion, roads and schools. We also passed several bills that directly impact rural schools, the ag supply chain, local communities and access to capital for agricultural businesses. In addition, we worked on three bills to secure Truth in Food Labeling, rural EMS reforms and attempted to improve the livestock siting regulations in Wisconsin.

We were able to secure $8.8 million for the Dairy Innovation Hub, which continues to work, full-steam-ahead, toward building Wisconsin's Dairy Super Power status with research into new applications for dairy products and practices. Rep. Tranel

and I led this strong investment in the intellectual infrastructure that supports dairy – and agriculture – as a whole. It was also championed by Rep. Kurtz, Rep. Novak and Rep. Oldenburg.

We were able to add $48 million to the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant program to connect rural Wisconsin. So far in 2020, 18% of the grant funding that has been distributed has gone to 10 projects in the 17th Senate District. We will see $4.4 million invested in broadband expansion in our communities because of these funds! Another round of applications opens on September 1, 2020 with a due date of December 1, 2020 for $24 million. This is great news for our communities.

Rural roads and rural schools continue to be on the top of my priority list. We made a $1 billion investment in roads and added $500 million MORE for schools. Education funding is the state's top expenditure and we currently invest at least $12.3 billion in our kids.

I also worked with Rep. Tranel to pass two bills – Acts 43 and 44 – that help rural teachers and rural school districts. These bills allow rural districts to recruit and employ teachers quickly, efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of our rural school districts.

We also worked to meet the unique needs of the ag supply chain by revising the hours for short-haul agricultural truck drivers, improving access to investment capital and updating crop insurance eligibility. A couple of our bills also help specific communities. Rep. Todd Novak and I authored Act 91 to help Jordan Lutheran Church in Browntown to install a motorized chairlift in their historical church so that their elderly parishoners could attend events in their fellowship hall.

Rep. Tony Kurtz and I authored Act 159 to help towns like Glendale who struggled with the Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) disaster assistance process following the flooding in 2018. This law makes WEM process funds and paperwork more efficiently so that communities can recover quickly.

As I look toward the 2021-22 legislative session, I am planning to re-introduce a number of bills that did not complete the legislative process, including the Truth In Food Labeling legislation I authored with Rep. Tranel and Rep. Oldenburg. I will also continue to push for road funding that specifically meets needs in rural Wisconsin, as well as initiatives to expand broadband in rural Wisconsin.

As always, please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov or call 608-266-0703.