

Sen. Marklein: 2021 year in review

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I am looking toward 2022 with optimism and enthusiasm for the future. But before I get too far into plans for the next year, I recently took some time to reflect on 2021 and my work on your behalf in the State Senate.

Without a doubt, I will always remember 2021 as the first year that I served as the Co-Chair of the Legislature's budget-writing Joint Committee on Finance (JFC). As a CPA, working on the state budget is very interesting (and dare I say, "fun") to me.

It was an honor to lead the Senate's work on the state budget. We funded all of our priorities while returning \$3.2 billion to taxpayers in tax cuts. We crafted a great budget for rural Wisconsin that included nearly \$120 million for local, rural roads, increased reimbursements for hospitals and nursing homes and support for the workers who care for us. Our bi-partisan budget, which was supported by seven democrats, including the Senate Minority Leader, is good for Wisconsin. In fact, Mike Koles, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA) said that this budget is the "best budget for towns in recent history."

In addition to the budget, I have authored 34 bills. Seven of my bills have been signed into law including Act 91, which was recently signed by the Governor in Necedah to create a new Purple Heart Memorial Highway on Hwy 21. This bill was suggested by VFW Commander and Purple Heart recipient James Starr of Necedah.

Nearly every bill I have authored was written at the request of a constituent. For example, Green County District Attorney, Craig Nolen and local law enforcement in Green County asked me to close a loophole for the operation of unregistered vehicles during a state of emergency. The Governor signed this bill into Act 108 recently.

I have several bills continuing through the legislative process, including:

- a Broadband Grant Program Modernization bill,
- a constitutional amendment to use generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) accounting for the state budget,
- Tobacco 21 legislation to align state law with federal law,
- Truth in Food Labeling legislation for our farmers,
- Rural EMS legislation to make the NREMT exam optional, and
- a bill to modernize the Next Gen 911 system.

We have three months of session left in the new year and I will be working hard to pass these bills, and others, that are still in process.

Many of my colleagues in the legislature are working on legislation and ideas that matter to you as well: election reform, sporting freedom, pro-life issues, public safety, workforce recovery and education. I continue to contribute to these conversations and will be working with my colleagues to advance ideas and reforms that I hear about when I am traveling throughout the 17th Senate District.

It has been wonderful to be out-and-about with you again. I missed the parades, dairy breakfasts, county fairs, spaghetti suppers and pancake breakfasts in 2020. This year, many of these great events rebounded and roared back better than ever.

I always gather terrific input and ideas when I am sharing a cup of coffee at a pancake breakfast or flipping burgers at the County Fair booth. This is where very meaningful connections are made and I learn a lot about you and the people I represent.

I have heard that many of you are glad that our kids are back in school and you praise the school districts for their tireless efforts to return kids to the classroom. I will continue to support the local leaders and decision-making that is happening in our schools. Every community is different and I believe that our local leaders are doing their very best to do what is right for our kids.

I also hear a lot about election reform. In February 2021, as a member of the Joint Audit Committee, I helped craft the scope of the audit performed by the non-partisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) to review the 2020 November election. I volunteered to work the polls in 2020 and know that our local election officials are working hard to make sure your votes are counted fairly. However, I also recognize

that there are ways we need to improve state law and the enforcement of state laws.

The legislature passed nine bills, eight of which were vetoed by Governor Evers, to reform our election laws. Most of these ideas were found to be deficiencies in the election process by the LAB – and were recommendations for reform. We will likely be bringing these ideas back again for a second consideration this spring.

I also continue to monitor programs and agencies that I know you care about. I am constantly analyzing the plans for road construction and funding for these programs because I know they matter to you. I also keep an eye on our state parks and trails. The final repairs to the Elroy-Sparta trail were finally finished in recent weeks after the flooding in 2018. While this took way too long to get done, I am glad that this trail will finally be open 100%.

I have also been working closely with several communities that were damaged by flooding in 2018 to ensure that they receive the funds due to them. This has often been an unnecessarily arduous process and prompted legislation to streamline it. There are still a couple of communities that have not been fully paid – and we're staying on top of it.

Clearly, there is a lot going on in your state government and throughout the 17th Senate District. In total, this year, my team and I have fielded more than 13,000 contacts via email, phone, US mail and in person. These contacts range from questions to requests for assistance to sharing an idea or opinion. While we may not always agree, it is my goal to listen and respond to your ideas and concerns effectively. I am blessed to work for an engaged, energized senate district and appreciate your contribution to our democracy.

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.