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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 13TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Rep. Hutton Announces Support For Counties Leading the Fight Against COVID-19

Prior to February 2020, when asked “what is Covid-19”, most Wisconsinites might have given answers ranging from a secret CIA mission, to a N-17 video game. Today we understand the Coronavirus to be an invisible enemy that has taken thousands of lives. Families have lost loved ones, ICU’s have been strained, and our country has suffered economic ruin not seen since the Great Depression.

As we sought to understand the effect of this new disease on our nation and our state, projections of sickness and death varied significantly. Scientists and medical professionals developed models to project outcomes based on several different approaches to containing the virus. Those models, while valuable, were and remain predictions of what may happen in the future if the government does not control specific aspects of public and private life.

Recall in early March, when the purpose of the lockdowns was identified. They had one purpose and one only - to “flatten the curve”, such that our hospitals and health care grid were not overwhelmed. Never, did ANY expert say the purpose was to eradicate the disease, or await a tested and proven vaccine. The stated objective was appropriate and has been proven effective. Even in our largest and most concentrated urban centers, our hospitals and their courageous staffs are meeting the challenge. And in most areas of our State, we now read daily accounts of furloughed medical staff, and occupancy rates at extremely low levels, as thousands of other diseases and ailments go ignored or under-treated.

As our focus has been consumed with what MIGHT happen, we are now turning around to face the reality of what HAS happened. My office is receiving daily contact from constituents who fear for their lives or suffer great pain. Not because of the virus, but because their biopsy, joint replacement, or a myriad of other significant health issues, have been labeled as “non-essential”. Many have waited for weeks just to find out if they have cancer, and if so, how and when to begin treatment. It is time to speak for THOSE patients, as well as those threatened by the virus.

These stories are not anecdotal – they are tales of real woe, told by real people; ALL of whom are your friends, neighbors, or fellow citizens. Several weeks ago, I wrote Governor Evers expressing concern about the potential for an increase in mental health issues such as suicide, substance abuse, and a host of other social and emotional afflictions resulting from the



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government-imposed shutdown. Tragically, this is no longer just “potential”, as the numbers from March and April in Milwaukee County show a 70% increase in EMS responses to mental health concerns, a 54% increase in drug overdose responses, a rise in domestic abuse, and an 80% increase in responses to suicide attempts when compared to the same time period last year. And these increases are on top of already record levels for such tragic metrics. The longer we continue the shutdown, the greater the collateral damage will be across metrics of societal health and welfare.

And what of the economic ravages, as friends and neighbors have seen their life's work erased and liquidated because the government decided their business was “non-essential?” Unemployment is nearing an unprecedented high with almost half-million Wisconsin citizens applying for unemployment compensation in the past few months.

The plans to reopen our state vary in scope and extent. All are based on opinion of what the future may bring. But until a vaccine and herd immunity develop, steps we take going forward should be considered within the context of managing risk within an open economy.

That is why I believe the decision on opening Wisconsin should not be one of monolithic decree handed down from Madison. Instead, we should release this decision to the bodies that govern the seventy-two counties in our State.

Based on feedback I have received from medical professionals, the business community, and those in local government within the 13th district I am urging the State of Wisconsin to reopen now. Leaders in these fields agree with a reasoned approach that does the following:

1. As we await the Supreme Court ruling, we should not be seeking to replace the Safer at Home order with another plan based on complicated, confusing, and nearly impossible standards.
2. Allows County Health Departments to take charge of their own response. Wisconsin has a very strong network of such departments that operate under regional oversight from DHS. Local health departments are uniquely positioned to be able to effectively address the specific challenges facing their own community as a result of COVID-19. In fact, several counties including Dane, Milwaukee, and Washington have already started taking steps to localize their approach to the pandemic when the State order expires.

The State should continue to serve an important role in partnering with the counties to provide local testing and procurement of Personal Protective Equipment from the



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Federal Government. This will allow local governments to have the resources to address continuing concerns in their communities.

3. Continues to protect those most susceptible to this virus. CDC and Wisconsin DHS data shows that a vast majority of cases requiring hospitalization and treatment occur in cases where the patient is over a certain age or has other health conditions. In partnership with local governments, our communities should lay out provisions to allow for those still needing shelter due to their condition or a relative living in their home, the ability to do so without undue economic harm. I have been encouraged by private companies taking the lead in applying CDC standards and encouraging work at home settings even before the government began mandating them.

Data shows Wisconsinites are already returning to a safer, more careful version of their lives. According to data tracking from Unacast, Wisconsinites are already starting to re-engage while government struggles to determine what reopening should look like. This echoes an article from Forbes magazine last week whose headline stated, “Apple Data Shows Shelter-In-Place Is Ending - Whether governments Want It To Or Not.” The longer we wait the less local governments will be able to credibly apply reasonable restrictions.

It is my belief that real recovery won’t come from elected representatives or unelected bureaucrats in Madison. When it comes to restoring the health and economy of our state, I place confidence in our remarkable citizenry: women and men who can use their gifts every day to serve their community, provide opportunity, and strengthen our state.

Wisconsinites take the responsibility for their personal liberty seriously. When given the ability to make their own decisions, I believe they will make wise and careful choices, not only for their own benefit but for that of their neighbors. This was clearly demonstrated before Safer at Home became law, when we witnessed countless individual businesses, both large and small, choose to incorporate safety precautions prior to government mandates.

It was demonstrated by remarkable community efforts; efforts from all manner of public, private, and faith-based entities, to serve those who were suffering. It was demonstrated by the tireless effort of our first responders and front-line health care professionals who willingly waded into the Corona crisis. To assume those communities will “return to the way they were before” is to underestimate the hearts of the people of our state who have already



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demonstrated their readiness to responsibly exercise their freedoms while honoring the safety of others.

As to the question of “safety versus the economy”, I do not believe it is an all or nothing proposition. It is not “unfeeling” to remind ourselves that, in addition to all the legitimate steps taken to combat this disease, we must consider alongside those measures, the health of our economy, and the millions who depend upon it. It is not “insensitive” to consider the long-term implications of the economic crash, alongside those of the disease. It is not wrong to suggest that it is time to return to living our “whole” lives, and not just the portion of life that requires a fight against a new disease. We all know, in the long term, we will need a strong and vibrant economy to undergird this fight. It is time to begin.

Wisconsin employers, business owners, and entrepreneurs will not rush wildly back; they will not forego the safety of their co-workers and customers. Instead, guided by the confluence of self-interest and the welfare of others, they will begin to put our economic engine back together in a measured and responsible fashion. Without a healthy economy, there can be no robust battle against the virus, or adequate funding for areas like education, or any of the multiple initiatives and programs we all support.

Obviously, wise and sensible precautions are called for as we return. And just as obviously, we will care for and support those of our fellow citizens who remain at higher risk. But people need hope and purpose, as well as protection. We are not made to cower in our homes, living lives of fear, uncertainty, and inactivity. Let’s remove the decision from Madison, and empower localities to access their own situation, and decide accordingly. Let’s put the challenges we face and the solutions they require into the hands of free and capable individuals. Let’s allow Wisconsinites to return to their lives, provide for their family, give back to their community, participate in worship, and look after their neighbors.

For the great citizens of our state, this “new normal” would not be new at all. Citizens using their wisdom and personal liberty to provide for their family and care for others has been the DNA of our state since 1848.

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