

It's Cold Outside for Our Furry Friends

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The Senator talks about looking out for our vulnerable furry friends. He works with a constituent to learn about unattended tethering, and introduces legislation to prohibit this harmful practice.

BRUNSWICK, WI - While it's not officially here yet, the winter season has come to western Wisconsin. Snow has fallen and temperatures have dropped close to zero. During these winter months, my family's two dogs enjoy exploring the outdoors. But, as the days get even colder, you'll find the dogs spending more time inside near the wood burning stove in our family room.

Not all animals find winter so enjoyable, especially if they're unable to warm up indoors. I recently learned the dangers for animals when kept outside for extensive periods of time. Even their furry coats aren't enough to keep them warm as their body temperatures drop and their paws freeze.

As a legislator, I've come to learn the value of an advocate's voice, while meeting community members and activists, and hearing their stories. These conversations are important reminders to look out for those who are vulnerable, including our furry friends who can't speak for

themselves. Our voices have power – we must speak up to take care of others.



In 2009, I introduced the Commercial Dog Breeders Licensure Bill, as a State Representative. This bill, enacted by Governor Doyle, created a licensure process and stronger regulations for puppy mills. The passage of 2009 Act 90 was an incredible accomplishment, but I quickly learned the work to protect dogs didn't stop there.

During the 2018 campaign, I met Becky who previously worked as a rural mail carrier. While on her route, she came across too many dogs who were permanently chained or tethered in a yard. Becky even saw dogs who were chained for such a long time that their collars became embedded into their skin.

She noticed other signs to indicate a dog has been chained for long periods of time. The area around the dog is a hardened dirt patch, and typically, the dog doesn't have any shelter, if any. Of course, with little-to-no social interaction with others, these dogs become very defensive of their territory, aggressive and can be dangerous to humans. According to the animal welfare advocacy group, UnChain Wisconsin, tethered dogs are nearly three times "more likely to bite, with children almost always being the innocent victim."

Too many dogs are permanently chained year-round. People often find themselves in unfortunate places in life and don't know what to do with the dog they adopted. Some owners forget about the responsibilities or a family member loses interest in the pet. Whatever the reason, the dog becomes victim of circumstances brought on by poor judgement. This neglectful practice heightens the risk for entanglement, dehydration, starvation, heatstroke, frostbite, trauma, disease and death.

The United States Department of Agriculture condemned unattended tethering, defining the practice as "inhumane." Despite their opposition and advocacy against this practice, little has been done to stop it. Many Wisconsin municipalities don't have ordinances to prevent these abusive practices or they don't have the resources to enforce it. The responsibility is left to neighbors and friends to intervene, which isn't always easy or successful.

Throughout the past year, I worked with Becky and others to develop the “Unattended Tethering” bill to prohibit these harmful practices and provide appropriate shelter for dogs. Specifically, the bill will prohibit owners from tethering their dogs during extreme weather or under unsafe conditions, ban tethering to treadmills or training devices and prohibit owners from leaving dogs unattended in a motor vehicle under life-threatening circumstances.

After years of working with dog owners, Becky rescued some dogs from these dangerous circumstances. However, she wanted to advocate for these animals, who have no voice, in a different way. Her experience and advocacy moved this policy proposal forward. During the holiday season, I encourage you to advocate for others, like Becky. Be sure to look out for others who may not be able to advocate for themselves and find a way to use your voice to get involved and to help.

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