

A Bipartisan Bedrock to Build On

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31

Wednesday, 27 December 2023 15:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 December 2023 15:53

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Senator Smith looks back at the bipartisan achievements of 2023 and the hope for continued collaboration in the New Year. Have a happy holidays!

BRUNSWICK, WI - While this is the time of year for reflection, it's also a time when we should look forward. Families may have celebrated weddings, births and other life changing events – these are the hallmarks of our past year. In the political sphere, headlines usually focus on events that are not so positive. Constructive bipartisan accomplishments are worth commemorating and remembering as we start the New Year.

Wisconsin has a biennial legislative session, so in the odd-numbered year, the legislature and governor go right to work on the next biennial budget. Certainly many of us would have liked a final budget that reflected priorities Governor Evers had placed in his proposal. But, like each budget presented by the governor since winning his election in 2018, the Republican-led Joint Committee on Finance rejected it and crafted their own version.

Trashing the Governor's budget wasn't the best way to start bipartisanship this year, however, both Democrats and Republicans got the job done for UW-Eau Claire's Science and Health Sciences building. That's huge for the UWEC, the Eau Claire community, the Chippewa Valley region and our state. It's an investment we can truly tout as a positive, bipartisan accomplishment. I hope you can be as excited as I am to see how the unique partnership between Mayo Clinic and UWEC plays out for our region being a leader in rural healthcare.

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For decades towns, villages and cities saw their share of state revenue declining. Revenue limits made it impossible for communities to keep up with inflation. Year after year, it became harder for local governments to meet the needs and expectations of their citizens. During the 2022 campaign, incumbents and challengers alike promised that shared revenue would be a top priority. We all know how campaign promises don't always pan out, but this bipartisan effort to fix shared revenue became real in 2023. In fact, the shared revenue bill was finished before the budget. This bipartisan achievement will pay dividends for our local communities for years to come.

A real headline grabber was state funding to upgrade the Brewers stadium. It captured the attention and imagination of the press and public. Opinions were all over the place about why public money should go toward a professional sports stadium. The state of Wisconsin is the owner and landlord of the property, and we have the responsibility to maintain it. I'm proud of the fact that, when the bill came to the Senate, we were able to foster a bipartisan partnership to protect our state's interests, fulfill our obligations and keep the Brewers in Wisconsin. On top of it all, we found a way to direct more resources to communities in every corner of Wisconsin and up the contribution by the Brewers to fund the final deal.



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Another bipartisan effort to highlight that will pay off for rural Wisconsin was the creation of the Agricultural Road Improvement Program. This program offers a one-time \$150 million investment to fix and upgrade deteriorating infrastructure to benefit agriculture. Keeping agricultural goods flowing through Wisconsin benefits everyone in our state.

Before we broke for the holidays, Republicans and Democrats teamed up again to modernize Wisconsin's alcohol regulations. This overhaul legislation makes many changes to Wisconsin current alcohol regulations and creates a new state office to implement and oversee them. Some of the beneficial changes are allowing wineries to stay open as long as bars and local brewers can now sell out-of-state beer and own off-site locations. This bill was good for enhancing oversight while also creating new opportunities for our local wineries and craft brewers.

Democrats and Republicans may fight like cats and dogs at times, but when we work together, we can accomplish great things. Here's to hoping 2023 was the bipartisan bedrock we can build on moving into 2024.

Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.