

Out of the Long Shadow of 2020

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Sen. Smith remembers the projects accomplished in 2020 and thinks forward to the work that still lies ahead.

MADISON - During this time of year, we take time to reflect on the previous year and try to focus on the good things that happened. Even in 2020 there must have been some good things, right?

We all know it's difficult to focus more on the good moments, than the bad. I often think about knocking on doors or holding mobile listening sessions in the district. I'd have a great day of conversations with folks who were friendly and respectful. It'd be just one conversation that didn't go well, that would continue nagging at me. That may be why most of us never make it as professional golfers or placekickers in the NFL.

Well, 2020's negative moments will cast a long shadow over the positive ones. But, there's still plenty to be grateful and optimistic for in the year ahead.

On January 22nd, Governor Tony Evers delivered the State of the State address. He reflected on the bipartisan accomplishments made in 2019 and the goals set for 2020. Most of us listening were blissfully unaware of the health crisis looming toward us. Despite COVID-19 setbacks, Wisconsin worked towards important goals announced during last year's State of the State Address.



Governor Evers consistently prioritizes educational opportunity on every level, whether it's for our children in K-12 schools or the students pursuing a college degree. During the State of the State address, Governor Evers announced the creation of the Task Force on Student Debt to understand how we can make college more affordable. I proudly served on this Task Force over 4 months, learning from experts about how we can achieve this goal. In August, the Task Force released policy recommendations, which could be introduced next session as legislation to help Wisconsinites.

In 2020, Governor Evers hoped to find ways to better support our family farms and rural communities. The Governor announced a three-pronged approach during the State of the State Address to help our agricultural industry. Under this plan, Governor Evers introduced a legislative package, created the Office of Rural Prosperity and established the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity. Two weeks ago, the Commission released their report, which will help build more resilient rural communities in Wisconsin.



During the 2020 State of the State Address, Governor Evers also announced the People's Maps Commission, to ensure Wisconsin's redistricting process is independent and nonpartisan. A decade ago, Republicans manipulated the maps so heavily in their favor. This broken system has prevented many policies from being passed, even if they're supported by most Wisconsinites, like Medicaid expansion.

The People's Maps Commission is currently holding public hearings to get input directly from Wisconsinites to create the next set of maps. These hearings will wrap-up and the Commission will introduce fair maps for the Legislature to approve in 2021. There's already a lot to look forward to next year.

We can also look forward to what comes next to improve broadband access in Wisconsin. The pandemic revealed how essential access to true high-speed broadband is in today's world. Last year, Governor Evers established the Broadband Access Task Force and I introduced the "Better Broadband" bill package to tackle this issue in our state's rural areas.



Unfortunately, like all the other 42 bills I introduced, these bills didn't receive a vote or even a public hearing in this hyper-partisan environment. Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald commented this legislation was a "good idea," on the senate floor, but still tabled it anyway. In 2021, I plan on re-introducing this legislative package. I also look forward to the work that comes out of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access next year.

This year, we faced unprecedented challenges. We offered solutions that were rejected, but every day is a new day. Hopefully, we can look back and find a way to improve in the New Year. We must find ways to break the cycle of anger and distrust we've sunk into.

Let's carry over only the good into 2021. For the sake of our nation and our children, it's our responsibility to find the goodness we wish to build on.

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