

New Year, New Opportunities

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Senator Smith explores new opportunities for Republicans and Democrats to work together for solving Wisconsin's challenges.

MADISON - The New Year is a time to look ahead, set goals, and make changes for the better. The best way forward is to glance backward, taking stock of what went well and what can be improved. Then, with last year in the rearview mirror, we can focus on how to make big impacts for the year ahead.

Last week I wrote about some of the bipartisan highlights we experienced throughout 2023. The first of our two-year biennial session is complete and the end of session is quickly approaching in May. There's so much more to accomplish before legislators hit the road for campaign season.

Child care continues to remain the most pressing issue our growing families face each day. Without long term investments in programs like Child Care Counts, our economy will spiral out of control. Child Care Counts was a successful program borne out of the pandemic that helped child care workers earn a better wage and employers to retain quality early-childhood

educators all while keeping the costs lower for families. Child Care Counts kept parents in the workforce and money in the pockets of the people who were spending it in our local economy.



Republicans have had numerous chances to extend the program and a multi-billion dollar surplus leaves us no excuse to not make this critical investment in our workforce and the development of our youngest. Thankfully Governor Tony Evers (D) was able to use \$170 million in emergency funding until June 2025. Our kids deserve better than a patch job. Wisconsin needs a long term solution for parents to stay in the workforce and for kids to have the early education they need to excel in life. We can get the job done, but it'll take a big bipartisan lift in the years ahead.

There's been a seismic shift in Wisconsin and nationally how we utilize renewable energy. Partisan disagreement is fading when it comes to climate-friendly energy alternatives. Businesses enjoy a better bottom line, residents can breathe better air quality and we can make the improvements needed to curb climate change now for our future generations. Our new energy infrastructure is coming from numerous sources spread over a wider area. That means infrastructure investments to transfer power from solar fields to subdivisions will need to be made.

The bill called, "Right of First Refusal" (ROFR) is making its way through the legislature. ROFR ensures that investments going to Wisconsin's grid are done by energy providers we've trusted for decades instead of opening the door to out-of-state companies that are more interested in turning a profit than properly and efficiently serving customers. ROFR has bipartisan support and there's a good chance it can pass into law before the end of session in May.

