

## A New Year Means Renewed Priorities

Posted on Dec 28, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



***Senator Smith writes about priorities for the upcoming legislative session and looks forward to introducing legislation to improve the quality of life of Wisconsin families.***

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BRUNSWICK, WI - Another year has flown by. As we celebrate the holidays I hope you have a chance to relax and enjoy time with your family and friends. While there is much to reflect on from 2022, it's also time to look forward to 2023.

Talking with constituents throughout the year, I know that Wisconsinites want to set the bar high. This year, we have a record-setting budget surplus that we can invest back into our communities to help them thrive. As I consider the upcoming legislative session and the many conversations I had this year, I have a wish list of what I'd like to see accomplished in 2023.

I hope that we can set politics aside to talk about the important issues, like what we can do to protect our citizens. A longstanding goal of mine is to ensure that we fully fund testing for PFAS in all of Wisconsin's wells. At the very least, you should know what is in the water you cook with and drink. Testing our water will give us the data we need to identify next steps, so we can ensure safe water for all.



We must finally replace the 30-year-old failed school funding formula with one that is fair for every child in Wisconsin. When school districts fall short on funds, local taxpayers have to shoulder the increased cost. In the past three decades, school districts whose residents have voted to raise their property tax rates have done better than those who can't afford to, leading to terrible inequity between districts. Channeling money from our budget surplus to meet shortfalls in schools is an investment in our children that will pay dividends down the road.

Local governments are encountering similar problems funding fire protection and law enforcement. The state provides tax dollars to local government through the shared revenue program to fund basic emergency services. Unfortunately, sometimes the share of revenue allocated to these purposes isn't enough. We can help local governments meet the needs of their citizens by restoring local control, which allows local governments to make operational decisions that keep essential services adequately funded.



Some life-changing policies can even bring in revenue. Marijuana legalization will increase the quality of life for many. Legalizing marijuana will increase revenue from legal sales while ensuring a safer product. Wisconsin polling shows voters strongly support legalizing marijuana. Many municipalities passed advisory referenda this fall in favor of legalization. I believe the

votes are there in the Legislature to pass a legalization bill, with only a few holdouts standing in the way.



When voters act via referendum and vote directly on the issues, we bypass the politics. Voting rights and reproductive rights are examples of where fears about political backlash have stalled efforts to follow the voters' wishes. Support for referenda questions is bipartisan. I introduced legislation last session to allow Wisconsin citizens to pass binding referenda questions into law and I will continue pushing for this change next year.

Final Five Voting is an idea that resonated with citizens across the political spectrum. Final Five Voting takes power away from the political parties and puts it in your hands. There's a great explanation about how Final Five Voting works online at [democracyfound.org](https://democracyfound.org). I introduced this bill alongside Republican co-authors last session, and look forward to doing so again.



Even in a time when politics have become so polarized, there is much to be done and reason to feel optimistic. It's very easy to fall into the narrative that we are too divided to get anything done. But the truth is that when we slow down, stay calm and listen to each other, we can learn a lot.

One thing we learn is that we care about many of the same things – our children, our safety, our quality of life and so much more. I hope you will join me in starting the coming year with a positive attitude and a love for our country, our fellow humans and our furry friends. Happy New Year, Wisconsin!

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