



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein August 20, 2021

Rain Check

August 29, 2021 marks three years since flooding devastated many communities across the 17th Senate District in August 2018. The flooding caused immense damage to homes, businesses, roads, and trails. After disaster strikes, governmental assistance is often available from agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM), and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Unfortunately, the help isn't always easy to get, bogged down by the bureaucracy and slow-moving government.

As clean-up and rebuilding has continued over the past three years, I have worked diligently to help communities receive reimbursements, push the DNR to fix the Elroy-Sparta State Trail and 400 State Trail, and assist homeowners navigating the complicated bureaucracy. In addition, I changed the law to streamline the reimbursement process from FEMA and WEM to local units of government and modernized the document transmission and payment processes.

The reimbursement process is long and complicated and is further slowed by bureaucratic inefficiencies, delays, and mistakes. In fact, there are still nearly 25 projects (of 184 total projects) in local communities waiting on reimbursements from FEMA and WEM from the 2018 flooding. On top of that, the Elroy-Sparta State Trail is still not completely open.

While many communities were able to receive reimbursement relatively quickly, some faced delays or had trouble navigating the complex process. Some communities were only missing a signature or final photograph before getting paid. Some received the federal reimbursement, but not the state portion. Unfortunately, WEM did not follow-up with a simple phone call or email to our communities until I started asking questions. Many of these issues could have been quickly resolved or completely avoided if WEM had been proactive in helping our communities receive the help they deserve.

Portions of the Elroy-Sparta State Trail remain closed in part because the Governor vetoed \$100,000 in funding for repairs. Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) and I fought hard to include the funding in the 2019-2021 state budget. Most recently, FEMA didn't submit paperwork on time causing additional delays.

The trail project, originally scheduled to be completed in "spring or early summer 2020", will now not be completed until at least December 2021; 3.5 years after the trails were originally damaged. Every day that the trail remains closed is another day that visitors and tourism dollars are not flowing into Juneau County. **These delays are unacceptable.** Bureaucratic incompetence should not be a reason for delayed payment to homeowners, businesses, and communities who have waited years for help.

After the Governor vetoed the funding in the state budget for the trail repairs, Rep. Kurtz and I sent a letter to the DNR asking that the money be returned for repairs to the Elroy-Sparta State Trail and 400

State Trail. **The answer we received was worse than “No”.** Governor Evers and the DNR sent the \$100,000 to Madison to repair the Badger State Trail and the Sugar River State Trail.

Through my proactive outreach, my office has also helped nearly 20 communities navigate the FEMA/WEM reimbursement process. Some had simple solutions, while some are more complex. My office will continue to work through these issues with FEMA, WEM, and the impacted communities as needed until every project is closed. I am so glad I have been able to help them.

In the future, when disaster inevitably strikes again, I stand ready to assist homeowners, businesses, towns, villages, and cities navigate the complex reimbursement process to receive their funding in a timely manner. I am hopeful that through the reforms we have made, the process will go more smoothly in the future. I am proud of the work I have done to ensure everyone is able to receive assistance and will continue to work until every project is complete and every dollar has been paid.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 608-266-0703 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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