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The 2022 General Election brought a return of ticket splitters to top of the ticket races in Wisconsin. The five on top of the ticket saw the election of three democrats and two republicans with a small percentage of Wisconsin voters (around 3% when looking at the difference between the vote for governor and U.S. Senate) split their ticket between parties.

The republicans in both houses of the legislature were able to gain seats in 2022. The state senate republicans picked up one seat in northwestern Wisconsin to get to a veto proof majority of 22 seats. The assembly republicans picked up three seats to get to 64 total seats which is two seats shy of a veto proof majority in the lower house.

How do the election results affect what we would like to get done and what we may have to play defense on for the next four years? To get any stand-alone bill signed into law this session, it will require the support of any state agency the bill may affect prior to passage by both houses, and likely the support of some democrats in both houses. This would be the same formula that was used in Governor Evers’ first term.

Two issues rise to the top of ones we would likely have bipartisan support to pass this session. Policy changes to encourage more people, namely middle and high school students, to choose a career in the trades is at the top of the list. Late last session WBA, along with ABC, AGC, the Operating Engineers, and the Carpenters Union worked together on legislation that would have expanded the list of reimbursable expenses for apprenticeships to include tool, materials, and travel costs and provide additional funding for the Youth Apprenticeship program. The bill passed the state assembly on a bipartisan vote, but time ran out prior to passing the bill in the state senate. We are already meeting with interested parties to restart the conversation to hopefully pass this bill next session.

Democrats and Republicans both agree that we need to find ways to bring down the cost of “workforce housing” or “starter homes”. One way to help bring down the start up costs of new housing developments would be to reduce the financing costs to pay for housing infrastructure like roads, water, sewer systems, and sidewalks. Expanding TIF laws has been a concept that we have not been able to pass in both houses, so we are now focusing on creating a state fund that would provide zero or low interests loans used for housing infrastructure. We have discussed this concept over the summer and fall and hope to have a proposal to further review in early 2023.

Some areas of concern that we likely will have to play defense on? Building codes. Governor Evers has been supportive of moving the Uniform Dwelling Code (UDC) and commercial Building Code to match the most recent codes offered by the International Code Council (ICC), especially for the energy code. The Evers administration and legislative democrats have also been supportive of local units of government being able to pass “stretch codes”. These stretch codes would be more stringent than the state energy code and would break the uniformity of the current UDC.

To push back against detrimental code changes, especially in the UDC, will require all of us working with WBA members on the Unform Dwelling Code Council and giving good examples and data (likely with help from the National Association of Home Builders) as to why those choices will increase the cost of housing without much of a return on energy conservation efforts.

Split power in state government will again bring opportunities and challenges when the new legislative session starts in January 2023.