

It's Time To Move Forward Past Political Division

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Senator Smith discusses the importance of bipartisan effort and cooperation going into the 2023 Legislative Session.

MADISON - Reflecting on my two years of service in the in the Wisconsin State Assembly and four years of service in the State Senate, I notice a stark difference in the way the people's business was handled then and now.

Don't get me wrong, there were still intense political disagreements, but we also discussed the merits of bills during public hearings and while meeting in the halls of the Capitol. The power of a good idea pulled Republicans and Democrats together.

During the 8 years of the Walker administration, the Majority Party largely ignored the Minority Party. Harsh political fights over collective bargaining rights, redistricting, voting rights and many other issues left legislators very little appetite for bipartisanship.

Then Governor Evers was elected, and the Majority Party continued to show little interest in working across the aisle. I've said it. Governor Evers said it. Even Republican leaders said it - "We need to work together." Still, the last four years has been marked by differing priorities, without the dialogue needed to resolve these conflicts.

Wisconsin has an estimated \$6.6 billion dollar surplus this year. We have an amazing opportunity to reinvest this surplus in our public school system, with Governor Evers' budget proposal adding \$2 billion in investments in public schools. However, Republican leaders have different priorities, including expanding school choice statewide.

We all agree a middle class tax cut is a good idea, and Governor Evers has proposed tax cuts that would give relief to low-income families, seniors and veterans. Moving forward, I'm hoping that we can come together on a tax plan that will help all Wisconsinites prosper.



Imagine if Democrats and Republicans stood shoulder to shoulder advocating for a middle class tax cut at a press conference. Imagine if the Majority Party invited the Minority Party to the table to discuss how to accomplish our shared goal. The final product would be more representative of the needs of all Wisconsinites.

Unfortunately, there's still some reluctance in really working together or perhaps there's uncertainty as to where we start. I have a few ideas on what we can do first.

As Senators and Representatives we bring our unique experiences and differing opinions to the job. Every new session offers us an opportunity to start a productive dialogue to learn from each other. We can't let our own bias and partisanship get in the way of doing what's right.



When I was elected four years ago to represent District 31 in the State Senate, I made a commitment with my team to meet with Democratic and Republican legislators in the Assembly and the Senate. Four years on, I'm renewing that commitment. I'll take this time to listen to their ideas and learn more about the communities they represent.

Having these conversations to acknowledge our differences and similarities is the first step for establishing mutual respect. These relationships can build trust so we can, again, make the right decisions for the future of our state.

A team's success begins and ends with trust in each other. As a lifelong sports fan and former high school sports participant (can't honestly say I was a star athlete, but I tried), I know how much further we get when we work as a team.

I've observed Republicans finding Democrats who might add their name next to theirs as co-authors of their bills. That's a good step, but adding names is not enough; it's about adding good ideas too. As legislators, we need to prioritize cooperative input and let the power of a good idea take root in our Legislature.

We have an opportunity to turn the page and heal the political divisions. Progress will happen once we put away the political scorecards and move forward.

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