

State Senator writes about the issues that bring people together. It's important that we don't let politics get in the way of doing what's right.

MADISON, WI - This past week, I met with several healthcare leaders from around the state. Dentists, dental hygienists, physicians, nurses, social workers and others discussed a whole gamut of healthcare topics.

Each professional was unique, but the message was the same – we need Medicaid expansion. It's been a long eight years for our health care professionals while they watched 37 other states fully expand Medicaid. It should be no surprise that taking back our money from the federal government was their number one request.

We need to listen to the professionals' recommendations. Let's set aside the partisanship and expand Medicaid. Playground politics is a dangerous game when it prevents people getting the care they need.

Wisconsin has lost $1.6 billion since 2009 because we haven't accepted full Medicaid expansion. Wisconsin spends $3.5 billion on Medicaid annually. Wisconsin would dramatically decrease the amount we spend on health care by expanding Medicaid. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, before Minnesota expanded Medicaid in 2013, they typically spent $4.9 billion. Now Minnesota only spends $61 million because they took the expansion.

We all face health challenges at some point in our lives. We'll need to access oral healthcare, address an addiction in the family or find long-term care for a loved one or ourselves as we age. That's why, according to a recent Marquette Law School poll, 70% of Wisconsinites support Medicaid expansion. Some issues are so paramount they surpass partisanship. Medicaid expansion is one of them.



Another issue that brings people together is water. We have never been so divided politically, but important issues like water unite all of us. Neighbors and strangers stand together for clean water, despite the choice of political yard signs. We've seen enough "divide and conquer" politics. It gives me hope to see people unite around important issues like keeping our water clean.



The same goes for our public schools – citizens of all political stripes work together to support local schools. When restrictions like revenue limits undermine our school districts, citizen groups often campaign for referenda to fill gaps in school funding and meet the needs of our students. Seeing neighbors and strangers with potentially contradicting political views accomplish shared goals give me hope there is a chance to do what's right.

Communities hit with natural disasters also see an incredible effort to work together. Disasters such as spring floods bring hundreds of people together to protect everyone's homes and businesses. Strangers are willing to step up, fill sandbags and provide comfort. It's in these life-or-death situations we find ourselves standing shoulder-to-shoulder working for what truly matters. In other words, when faced with shared challenges, we have shared values.

Medicaid expansion is another chance for neighbors and strangers to pull together right now to do what's best for everyone. It may not be your contaminated well water, your school district's referendum, your house in the floodplain or your child without health care. But we are one community. We care about one another.



Making the right choices doesn't have to depend on political affiliation. After all, everyone pays taxes. Each tax dollar isn't put into separate pots for Republicans, Democrats or Independents. The money we paid into federal and state programs belong to all of us. We can't let politics get in the way for doing what's right.

Contact your legislators today. Call the members on the Joint Finance Committee, who are reviewing the budget and making crucial decisions that will affect each of us. Tell them to stop prioritizing their own political ambitions and jeopardizing health care access. Demand we come together to accept our Medicaid expansion money now.