

Sen. Smith: “Enough of Divide and Conquer Politics”

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 24 July 2019 00:43 -

<https://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/milw-valley-powerplant-s5.jpg>



Wisconsin is a great place to live, work and raise a family because of the unique cities that make up our state. Building relationships between our rural and urban communities makes us stronger.

MADISON - When politicians have no answers, they find a way to distract constituents. Politicians have a knack for finding a scapegoat to blame when a plan is failing. It's been the game played by politicians for decades.

We're seeing it played out as Speaker Robin Vos and Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald turn on their favorite scapegoat: Milwaukee. Republicans have failed our state time and again, they want you to believe Milwaukee is responsible for your expectations not being met.



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This plan has proven to work for them. They work to anger voters and convince them that somebody else is taking more than their share.

We can't continue to let politicians divide our state for petty political points. Rather than pitting voters against voters or one city against another, we should be working together for a stronger Wisconsin.



This isn't a new strategy for politicians. In 1979, Representative William Gagin (my own representative at the time) said money was going to that “black hole” in Milwaukee when asked why some critical programs were underfunded. Now, you might choose to believe he meant no harm with that statement, but you'd be wrong. It was a racist statement then and is a racist statement now. Fortunately, that statement doomed Gagin from serving another term, but sadly, the idea that Milwaukee is undeserving still exists today.

During former Governor Walker's campaign in 2010, he blatantly said to one of his billionaire donors that his strategy was to “divide and conquer” our state. These statements by Representative Gagin and Governor Walker define what the political rhetoric is really about – tapping into the fears and biases of rural voters to hold power.

We're still seeing this game played today. In April, Republican Joint Finance Committee members rejected Governor Evers' proposal to provide an additional \$40 million for replacing lead service lines because they feared Milwaukee would get too much of the funding. Milwaukee and the entire state will miss out on critical lead service line replacements just because Republican leaders claimed most of the additional funding was directed towards Milwaukee.

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Just last week, Republican leaders threatened to take a veto override vote to prevent Milwaukee from using additional transportation dollars for their streetcar project. While Milwaukee officials publicly stated they do not plan to use the funds for that project, Republican leaders spread misinformation to villainize Milwaukee and score political points outstate.



Why do Republican bullies pick on Milwaukee? After all, Milwaukee is the largest city in Wisconsin with plenty of history to make us all proud. The City is known as a manufacturing hub, shipping center, and brewing capital. The City draws in billions of tourism dollars every year and has its spot on the map as a critical freshwater research center. And millions of fans throughout the state cheer on the Brewers and Bucks each year. So, why does the Republican propaganda machine think it's alright to dis the largest and most culturally diverse city in our state?



We should treasure these important drivers of our state rather than resent them. We can't let politicians drive wedges between the cities in our state that make Wisconsin so unique. Republican leaders shouldn't continue playing divide and conquer political games to pit all of us against each other.

Prosperity throughout Wisconsin is not a zero-sum scenario. If Milwaukee suffers, our whole state suffers. If western Wisconsin prospers, our whole state prospers. Instead of thinking about “giving” or “taking,” we need to think about how we can all work together to make our entire state a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Just like the adage about breaking a bundle of sticks, if we remain together we will be strong. If Republicans continue choosing to divide our state, our future remains less certain. Enough with the political games! Let's work together to move all of Wisconsin forward.