

Bill Kaplan: Wisconsin can help Joe Biden win

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The Trump administration has left Wisconsin's economy in shambles: over 2,000 dairy farms lost, a manufacturing sector in recession (Foxconn's factory is not the "eighth wonder of the world"), 12.8 percent unemployment in Milwaukee and double-digit unemployment in Forest, Iron and Menominee Counties. Federal Reserve minutes said: "Uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook remained very elevated, with the path of the economy highly dependent on the course of the virus and the public sector's response to it."

But the GOP-led Senate and Trump let the federal \$600 weekly jobless benefit expire, ended the small business loan program, did not renew protections against evictions and loss of homes and refused to aid bankrupt local and state governments. Meanwhile, there are over 5.7 million COVID-19 cases nationally, 70,000 plus in Wisconsin. U.S. deaths are past 176,000 and 1,00 plus in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin needs help and hope. The pandemic forced the long-anticipated Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee to become virtual. However, Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris offer inspiration, optimism and detailed plans for relief, recovery and reform. Biden said: "As president, the first step I will take (is) get control of the virus that has ruined so many lives. ... We will never get our economy back on track, we will never get our kids safely back in schools, we'll never have our lives back until we deal with this virus".

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Biden wants to be a president for the entire country, and has united the Democratic Party. Vermont Independent Senator Bernie Sanders gets it: “I will work with progressives, with moderates, and yes, with conservatives, to preserve this nation from a threat that ... our heroes fought and died to defeat.” And, Republicans are stepping up to support Biden. Former Ohio GOP Governor John Kasich said: “(You) have to take off your partisan hat, and you’ve got to realize we’re Americans.” In deeply divided and polarized Wisconsin, Kasich can help.

In 2016, Trump won Wisconsin by 22,748 votes. “(The) Biden campaign is intent on not repeating a mistake ... made (in 2016), going for the big win and overlooking must-win states like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin” (Cook Report). Kasich can “connect with independents and disaffected Republicans who may help swing the election ... in states such as Wisconsin ...” (Hill). Additionally, Biden’s campaign will focus on cities, rural areas and suburbs.

There are 23 Wisconsin rural counties that backed Obama in 2012, but flipped for Trump in 2016. These Obama voters are not racists. The Biden economic plan for rural areas can help win back farmers and rural small towns. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin and Representative Ron Kind will be indispensable in accomplishing this. Finally, a major effort must be made to maximize Democratic turnout in Green Bay, Madison-Dane County and Milwaukee and its suburbs. Unions, retirees, and civil rights groups will be key.

Biden is spot-on about being in a fight for “the soul of the nation.” We are Americans. Wisconsin can help Joe Biden win.

-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.