

# Bill Kaplan: Biden promises help for all Americans

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President Joe Biden used his Inaugural Address to outline severe challenges ahead: "A once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country. (It has) taken as many lives in one year as America lost in all of World War II. Millions of jobs ... lost. Hundreds of thousands of businesses closed. A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. ...and now ... political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and ... defeat."

Biden pledged to unite America, saying: "I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did. ... We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts. If we show a little tolerance and humility. ... We will get through this together. Together."

Action: Biden will ask Congress to pass a \$1.9 trillion recovery plan. It includes help for the 10 million who lost jobs, nearly 8 million additional poor, funding to reopen schools safely, expand healthcare coverage and paid sick-family leave, relief to small businesses, emergency help for local and state governments and public health funding to defeat COVID-19.

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Biden has also issued public health executive orders: Mask wearing on federal property and interstate travel, using the Defense Production Act to ramp up production of PPE and vaccine – Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has long advocated – more testing, steps to assure health equity, guidelines on

reopening schools and research on treatments.

Seventeen newly-elected GOP House representatives sent Biden a letter: "Congratulations on the beginning of your administration and presidency. ... We hope to work with you to extend targeted, meaningful coronavirus relief for families and businesses ... and restore our economy ... . We firmly believe that what unites us as Americans is far greater than anything that may ever divide us." A good beginning.

I hope Wisconsin Republicans are listening. A minority of GOP state legislators are demanding an end to the statewide mask mandate. 37 states, including many GOP-led, have mask mandates. The American Hospital, Medical and Nurses Associations have all strongly urged mask-wearing to check COVID-19 spread. Moreover, GOP state legislators from 7 states have died from COVID-19. Some never wore masks. NH GOP Governor Chris Sununu spoke about the tragic loss of NH GOP House Speaker Dick Hinch: "For those who are just out there doing the opposite just to make some ridiculous political point, it is horribly wrong. Please use your heads."

Wisconsin Democratic state Senator Jon Erpenbach pleaded: "Is the crazy minority going to control the big majority?" Assembly GOP Speaker Robin Vos has not signed onto the legislative demand to end the mask mandate. I appeal to his "better angels". Vos showed real leadership in partnering with Wisconsin Democratic Congressman Mark Pocan in a joint PSA to urge wearing masks. As Vos knows there is no rural-urban divide on COVID-19 spread. We're one great state. Let's come together.

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