

Bill Kaplan: New Year's resolution, bipartisan cooperation

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Hope is in the air with the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, President-elect Joe Biden and a new Congress. Biden said: "Brighter days are coming. But it's going to take all the grit and determination we have as Americans to get it done." He promised enhanced national educational and vaccination efforts, using all the powers of the federal government. Moving forward, Biden will ask "the American people to wear a mask for the first 100 days" And, he thanked former New Jersey GOP Governor Chris Christie for "encouraging people to do the right thing and wear a mask for themselves, their loved ones, and their country."

The pandemic will worsen before getting better. Nationally a cumulative 20 million+ cases and 350,000+ deaths. Wisconsin endures a cumulative total near 500,000 cases and approaching over 5,000 deaths. A divided Wisconsin must rise to the COVID-19 challenge. As Ohio GOP Governor Mike DeWine said: "The virus doesn't care if we voted for Donald Trump (or) Joe Biden." Louisiana GOP Congressman-elect Luke Letlow died of COVID-19 as did newly elected New Hampshire GOP House Speaker Dick Hinch.

There are encouraging signs of bipartisan cooperation in Wisconsin. Democratic Congressman Mark Pocan and GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos showed leadership in jointly urging all Wisconsinites to wear masks, practice physical distancing and trying to stay home while awaiting vaccination. Pocan later pressed Vos to require masks in the Assembly. Moreover, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin and GOP Congressman Bryan Steil issued joint letters to Evers and Trump asking for "accurate and transparent information" on vaccine distribution. And, 8th District GOP state Senator Alberta Darling was spot-on in condemning the "intentional destruction of vaccine doses" in Grafton.

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However, much more is needed. Evers and Vos should build confidence and counter mistrust by getting vaccinated together publicly. The urban and increasingly suburban vs. rural divide must be surmounted to beat COVID-19. Moreover, Evers should ask all former governors to sign on to a joint statement imploring Wisconsinites to wear a mask and get vaccinated. Bipartisan cooperation is also needed on healthcare coverage.

The new state legislative session demands a reset between Evers and GOP leaders. The nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum's recent report projecting a \$373.1 million deficit points the way to "help close the gap" between spending and revenue - Medicaid expansion. 38 states, including many GOP-led, have done so. During the Trump administration, GOP-led Idaho, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Utah adopted Medicaid expansion. Time for Wisconsin to make the fiscal and moral choice.

Senate Minority Leader Janet Bewley said: "I think we have the opportunity to demonstrate more clearly now than ever that accepting the Medicaid money, which is ours and it is there for us to just take, we could be helping our budget more than hindering it." Similarly, former 32nd District GOP state Senator Dan Kapanke said: "As far as Medicaid dollars coming from the federal government, certainly with COVID the dynamics have changed ... I would be open to accepting those dollars" On Wisconsin.

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