

Rep. Petersen: Passing of former State Senator Joe Llean

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As part of my faith, I've always cherished God's blessings of bringing people into my life at the precise time they've been needed. A couple of days following my primary win for 40th Assembly District, the phone rang. Calling was former State Senator, Wisconsin Department of Health Services Director, and Federal Health & Human Services (HHS) Consultant Joe Llean, asking: "Kevin - are you really serious about winning?"

"Yes," I answered.

Joe replied: "Good! Meet me at my shed tomorrow at 10:00 am, we need to talk." Not only did we talk, but Joe became my political mentor and even more importantly, he became my friend.

The statesman I have become today, would not be the same without all the years of Joe Llean's mentoring and friendship.

Joe personified statesmanship. First elected to the Wisconsin State Senate in 1984, he represented the 14th Senate District for 10 years, getting re-elected in 1988 and 1992. In 1989, Llean was appointed to the influential budget-writing Joint Finance Committee becoming co-chair of the powerful committee after Republicans secured the Senate majority in 1993.

Resigning from the Senate in 1995, he accepted an appointment from Governor Tommy Thompson as secretary of the newly reorganized Department of Health and Family Services (now the Wisconsin Department of Health Services). During his 6 year tenure as secretary, Joe was instrumental in creating Wisconsin's state health insurance program called BadgerCare.

In 2001, newly elected President George W. Bush appointed Governor Thompson the United States Secretary of HHS. Leean resigned as secretary upon being asked to join Thompson as a consultant in Washington, D.C.

My thoughts and prayers are with his wife Ginny and the entire Leean family on Joe's passing. He was husband, a father, a family member, and to some of us he was a dear friend.