

# Steve Gunderson & Dale Schultz: Moving forward together: call for citizenship

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As the world's oldest republic approaches its 250th birthday, many are openly wondering if our democratic system of government will survive to see that 2026 anniversary. New challenges to our economy, security, technology and education system seem to pop up on a daily basis.

Regrettably, the current American political landscape has not responded to these challenges with the collaboration and understanding needed to address such issues and solve the problems they have created but, rather, with ideological obstruction.

Wisconsin has been described as "point zero" for polarization. We are seeing this red-blue divide up and down the ballot with close races for Governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and state Senate and Assembly races. Our candidates running for office are smart enough to know that one easy way to get your vote out is to polarize. While that might be the "smart" political thing to do, it is really not good for the long-term health of our political system, and certainly not good for governing.

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It's awfully easy just to say "no" and simply take your ball and go home. But that's not the Western Wisconsin way. To paraphrase the 20th century humorist H. L. Mencken - for every complex problem there's at least one solution that's simple, neat, and wrong. Indeed, obstructionism solves nothing.

Thirty-five years ago, hundreds of our Western Wisconsin friends and neighbors

across the political and ideological spectrums came together to work on a project known as “Western Wisconsin 2000” in an effort to diversify our economy and become less reliant on a single industry as we moved into the 21st century. Working together, we accomplished that goal.

At the same time elected officials from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois collaborated on a bipartisan basis to move legislation to address the myriad issues facing the Upper Mississippi River watershed. Again, working together, we were able to integrate and preserve the recreational, environmental and commercial uses of that watershed for future generations of Western Wisconsin residents.

Likewise, when extensive flooding occurred, in nine southern Wisconsin counties, working together, we marshalled the resources of local, county, state and federal agencies to assist with response and recovery efforts.

In short, we have a proud tradition of achieving progress in Western Wisconsin through connection and collaboration, not obstruction.

That’s why, as the Nov 8th election approaches, we are writing to our many friends and neighbors in Wisconsin to encourage them to choose public servants who, as our Wisconsin state motto suggests, will move our state and its citizens “Forward” through connection and collaboration. Indeed, both our republic and its democratic system of government may well depend on electing people who possess and practice those qualities. Remember, when our democracy works, we can address the problems facing us. We can move beyond polarization to solutions. And, we can build a brighter future for everyone.

*- Gunderson was a Republican congressman who represented Wisconsin’s 3rd congressional district from 1981-1997, and was a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly from the 91st District from 1975-1979.*

*- Schultz was a Republican state senator who represented Wisconsin’s 17th Senate District from 1991-2015. He was previously a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly from 1982-1991.*