

Serving Wisconsin: Retiring Senators Offer Wisdom

Posted on Dec 08, Posted by [Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



Three retiring Senators – Tim Cullen, Bob Jauch and Dale Schultz call upon their colleagues to work together in the best interest of the people and warn against the dangers of hyper partisanship and outside groups taking the power that should rest with the people.

MADISON - “There is a yearning outside the Capitol for common sense, cooperation and compromise,” Senator Tim Cullen told his fellow Senators. “You all know how to do this if you’ve been married for more than 15 days.”

As 2014 comes to a close, so do the public careers of several extraordinary Senators. I listened carefully as these public servants delivered farewell speeches on the Senate floor. The wisdom shared by three great men comes from a cumulative 80 years of experience that spanned four decades.

“We came because we care,” Republican Senator Dale Schulz told his colleagues. “I ran for public office because I felt called.”

“We’re on this earth to help others,” said Democratic Senator Cullen who also served in Governor Thompson’s Republican administration as Secretary of Health.

“Our obligation is to empower the people; not to avoid them because they are of a different political persuasion,” said Democratic Senator Bob Jauch. “We are the caretakers of the public trust. We serve in the people’s place.”

Empower the people is certainly what Senator Jauch accomplished. This year the Pepin-based Flyway Film Festival presented the film Wisconsin's Mining Standoff, which prominently features Senator Jauch and his work to empower local people and protect the natural resources of our state.

Senator Jauch joined Senators Cullen and Schulz in drafting an iron ore-mining bill that addressed the stated concerns of the mining company while respecting the local people's wishes, the Native American tribes' role and the federal regulator's requirements. Although the carefully crafted bill didn't pass, the work stands as one of the last great bipartisan achievements.

It's not surprising as all three men retire, the lessons they share relate to the value of working together and the dangers of partisanship and ideology.

"[We should] lift up ideas, not ideology. Ideology stifles thought," said Cullen.

"Our history is not written on partisanship, but on partnership," said Jauch. "Politics ought to be the practice of solving problems.

"We have to quit asking ourselves which team we're on. I'm on the people's team," shared Schultz. "Partisanship is a lens not a straightjacket. We've got to stop thinking of the other side as the enemy."

Senator Schultz expanded on the idea of 'who the real enemy is' in a Wisconsin State Journal story:

"Here's how I see the enemy. The enemy is poverty in a country and a state that has no business having kids and families go to sleep hungry at night or in their cars.

“The enemy is unemployment and underemployment, because nobody asked an employer advertising a good job if they were R or Ds, they were just thankful to get a job that gave them worth and put food on the table.

“The enemy is those who encourage an undereducated citizenry. Education is the key to helping give people a hand up and a better future.

“The most dangerous enemy of all...is the enemy closest to us. It lives with us and within us. The real enemy is fear. We fear what we do not understand. We fear those who are different. We fear losing what we have.

“When we take away our masks, and face each other...without judgment, fear of loss or recrimination, then we can begin to listen, we can begin to talk, and then we can begin to build a better future.

All three Senators speak about the dangerous trend of allowing outside groups to take power that should be reserved for the people and about elected officials representing the people's interests.

“‘We the people’ has been substituted with ‘we the privileged,’” said Jauch.

“Be careful of accepting support from powerful groups,” warned Cullen. “You may think you have your hands in their pockets but in the end, they have their hands in your pockets. The best thing we can do is to say ‘no’ to our friends.”

Senator Schultz summed it up well, “When some think tank comes up with the legislation and tells you not to fool with it, why are you even a legislator anymore? You just sit there and take votes and you're kind of a feudal serf for folks with a lot of money.”

Thank you for your service gentlemen. We are humbled in your shadow.

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