

MADISON - I've been hearing a lot lately about how young people want nothing to do with politics and are running away from civic life.

So Millennials don't want to be politicians. Has anyone stopped to think maybe they want to be leaders instead?

By force of habit, we refer to elected officials as our nation's leaders, our state's leaders and our community's leaders. But based on what I've seen over the course of my life, I can't think of a class of people generally less involved with leadership than politicians.

True leaders give credit and take blame. Politicians almost always do the exact opposite.

Leaders don't need handlers. Politicians rarely move a muscle without consulting their consultants. They have pollsters who tell them what to think, and speech writers who tell them what to say, and donors and lobbyists who tell them what to do. That is a lot of things, but it is not leadership.

Politicians are exceptionally practiced at knowing which way a parade is heading and running to the front and grabbing a drum. Leaders don't look for parades.

There is nothing, and I mean nothing, more important to your average elected official than winning the next election. Doing the right thing doesn't even come in a distant second. I am not sure what you call that, but it is not leading.

My observation over the years and especially in recent days is that there is indeed something more important than winning elections to those who call themselves party "leaders." When

forced to choose between losing elections and losing control, party bosses will sacrifice electoral success every time. They can live with losing members, they can explain away defeats at the polls. They cannot bear surrendering control. I don't know exactly what kind of ship that is, but it is not leadership.

Millennials get badmouthed a lot by older folks. Teens and twenty-somethings are too dependent on technology. They don't know the true meaning of hard work. They don't this and they don't that. There are a great many explanations for the bad rap, I suppose. But I think a big one is that those with more gray on the roof are much more likely to confuse behaviors commonly observed in the political arena with leadership.

I may be in a small minority, but I am bullish on the Millennials. I think they will turn out to be a transformational generation. One reason I have for this faith in them is their profound distaste for all those common political behaviors, which means they have a fighting chance to maximize their capacity for genuine leadership.