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News Column by Rep. Steve Doyle

2011 in Review

We end the year of 2011 as a deeply divided state. Our current political environment has turned neighbor against neighbor and family member against family member. Democrats are sure that the Republicans, especially Scott Walker, started it. Republicans are sure the Democrats are to blame. Many people simply say “a pox on both your houses.”

I was elected to the State Assembly in May of this year, in the midst of the most intense partisan turmoil in our state’s history. Today there is little cooperation, or even trust, between the two parties. But it wasn’t always that way. In the early 1980s, I worked for a Democratic senator whose closest political ally was Republican Governor Tommy Thompson. Staffers had friends in both parties, bipartisan softball leagues, and bipartisan social events. One year the Capitol staff from both parties sponsored a spring prom. We had music and dancing and everyone had a great time. I remember that day well because it was the day I got engaged to my wife Gloria. The two parties also worked together in the legislature in those days. In fact, at the beginning of one particular term, it was the Assembly Minority Leader, a Republican, who nominated the Democrat who would be elected Speaker.

We have to learn to work together or face the consequences of the old adage, “united we stand, divided we fall.” Our country has added jobs every month for more than a year. However, in each of the past five months since the budget passed, Wisconsin has lost jobs. Tens of thousands of working poor in our state face the imminent loss of health insurance through BadgerCare. These aren’t Democrats or Republicans who are suffering – they are people and families. Our school districts and other local governments are financially strapped, with La Crosse county’s largest school district warning of a \$2.8 million shortfall for next year. These are serious issues that need to be handled with a united front.

We have been through tough times before and those struggles brought us closer. Today, however, hard times seem to drive us apart. We demonize the teacher or the successful business owner for what they have and we seek to pull them down rather than raise the rest of us up. In the long run that mentality will hurt us all. It must change.

This is where politics and politicians have failed us. Over the next few months we will be bombarded by political ads from the national to the state level. Most of them will tear down their opponents rather than tell us why we should support their candidate. No wonder people get



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discouraged and some simply refuse to vote. If the airlines ran attack ads against each other like politicians do, would you ever get on a plane again?

Before being elected to the State Assembly, I spent a quarter-century in local government. When I look at my colleagues on the County Board, school boards, and city, village and town boards, I am optimistic for our future. These people get it. When faced with tough times they hike up their suspenders and work together. Many of them will be running for election and re-election this spring. You will meet them at your doorstep, see their flyers and learn their visions for the future. You will hear why you should vote for them. Rarely will they tell you why you should vote against their opponent. That's how politics should work at every level.

I've spent my first few months in state office trying to deliver the message I promised to take to Madison. That is the message of cooperation instead of confrontation. I've had some success; there is still a long way to go. My hope for the New Year is that more people in public office hear that message. We owe it to you, the people we represent.