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A House Divided: Comments from State Rep Show the Current Chasm in Wisconsin

Statement of Alderman Michael J. Murphy
April 10, 2019

To see just how divided we are as a state, look no further than the comments from state Rep. John Nygren in an online article published today by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (“**GOP leaders criticize Gov. Tony Evers' lead pipe replacement plan, raising concerns that too much money would go to Milwaukee**”).

Talking to reporters yesterday in Madison about Governor Evers’ budget proposal to borrow \$40 million to replace lead water service lines across the state, Rep. Nygren, co-chairman of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee, said this:

“My understanding is that the proposal — a vast majority of it — is going to Milwaukee,” Nygren said. “While we had targeted our response to the lead issue as a local opportunity for communities to get involved and provide assistance at the local level, rather than people from Marinette funding lead replacements in Milwaukee. I'm not sure that that's necessarily fair from a taxpayer standpoint.”

In the big picture, Rep. Nygren’s quote points out – sadly – how divided our state has become and how disconnected many of our state legislators are from what their role should be. I think his comments are incredibly short-sighted and disappointing.

State income and other taxes we all pay as citizens of Wisconsin are used to pay for all manner of public infrastructure and environmental projects across the state. If I was asked whether I would be OK with my state tax money being used to clean up poisoned groundwater in Marinette County (not far from Rep. Nygren’s home) caused by Tyco I would say that that would be worthwhile use of that money, and I suspect a large majority of my fellow Wisconsinites would agree.

But when it comes to helping do much the same – in this case replacing lead water service lines in Milwaukee and other communities across Wisconsin – state Rep. Nygren and other GOP state legislators don’t think it is “fair.”

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Instead of fulfilling his oath to protect the health, safety and welfare of ALL residents of the state, Rep. Nygren is continuing to use the toxic “divide and conquer” tactic of pitting people in certain parts of Wisconsin against residents in other parts of the state, pitting one community against another.

It’s despicable to deal in fear and to appeal to people’s worst inclinations and emotions, but that’s what we are seeing.

A house divided cannot stand – it’s time to start appealing to the better angels of our nature.

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