

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

11:39 AM

Walker's campaign event offers differing opinions on gov's cooperation pledge

When Gov. Scott Walker made his victory speech Tuesday night, he mentioned his desire to move forward and put the rancorous election behind him.

"I'm committed to it whether you voted for me or not," said Walker, suggesting meetings with Dems over beers and brats.

Some Walker supporters at his victory party agreed that Walker should try to heal the rift. But many others -- along with some GOP politicians who were present -- defiantly rejected the idea of reaching out to the other side.

Kevin Hladilek, a small business owner from Kenosha, said he admires that "Walker is doing what he said he was going to do" but said the gov needs to learn to offer some compromise in the future.

"More talk about what he's trying to propose and try to come to a compromise, because, I mean, our government's not supposed to operate by just jamming any kind of legislation down our throats," said Hladilek. "Just talk a little bit more and be a little more compromising."

Edna Walls of Waukesha agreed it would do Walker well to reach out.

"I think he should put out his right hand and try to include (Democrats) in everything," she said. "Possibly include them in all the meetings and things that they have and get their input."

But Bridget Heinze of Big Bend defended Walker as a "gentleman" and doubts that his opponents will listen.

Some GOP lawmakers agreed.

State Sen. Alberta Darling, R-River Hills, complained it should be a two-way street.

"I think the other side needs to reach out to Governor Walker as well," said Darling, who survived a recall election last summer. "I think the governor tried to reach out to a lot of Democrats and he can try harder, but they also need to try harder. Their goal was to make him look bad."

Added Darling: "We're not going to give in to our principles. We're not going to raise taxes, we're not going to increase spending. We're going to live within our means and grow the economy."

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson, a U.S. Senate candidate, said people are "fed up with the divisiveness" and suggested Walker travel the state to talk to people. "The power of the governor is immense," Thompson said. "The governor can pretty much command front-page attention. ... I think definitely he's going to reach out."

Another U.S. Senate candidate, Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald, was defiant.

"I think we always have reached out," said the Horicon Republican. "We just never heard anything from the other side. You know, they ran an entire campaign that wasn't even based on the reason the recall happened, collective bargaining, because they see the reforms are working. So yeah, we can definitely reach out, but unless they're willing

to work with us, that will never happen."

Retiring state Rep. Michelle Litjens, R-Oshkosh, said it's up to Wisconsin residents to heal their own rifts. "I have friends I haven't talked to since this started," she said. "I don't know if Governor Walker can heal the rift but I think Wisconsin can heal the rift."

U.S. Senate candidate Mark Neumann and Waukesha County Executive Dan Vrakas said they're sure Walker will give it a try.

"I think he will reach out to his opponents," said Vrakas, in an interview before Walker gave his victory speech. After the speech, the former lawmaker said, "You've got your answer. I think it was great that he invited the legislators for brats."

Neumann said, "I think you saw him extend the olive leaf," adding that creating jobs would do the most good to calm voter angst.

U.S. Senate candidate Eric Hovde said Walker never personally attacked teachers or others. "This is not about individuals, it's about a battle with the unions and collective bargaining," said Hovde.

Of Walker's relationship with opponents, Hovde said, "I think he has to talk a lot, reach across the aisle. Ask them to join him on the bigger mission, and it's all going to take time."

But state Dem chair Mike Tate said if Walker wants to bring the state together he needs to reach out to those who signed the recall or voted against him with actions, not just words.

-- By Kay Nolan