

Senator Herb Kohl Speaks at our Rotary Meeting

March 21, 2011

(Editor's Note: Our Club was honored with the presence of Senator Herb Kohl. Unfortunately, I was out of town and not able to summarize his remarks. Therefore, the following is reprinted, in part, from the Tuesday, March 22, 2011 Eau Claire Leader-Telegram article written by Jon Swedien of the Leader-Telegram staff.)

U.S. Senator Herb Kohl made a call for bipartisanship and cooperation during a visit Monday, March 21, to Eau Claire. An atmosphere of divisiveness is prevalent in Washington and now Madison, Kohl said while speaking to the Eau Claire Noon Rotary Club at Sweetwaters Restaurant.

"Washington has nothing on Wisconsin when it comes to partisan clashes," Kohl said, referencing the recent battles between Governor Scott Walker and public employee unions over a bill passed by the Republican controlled Legislature and signed by Walker to strip those unions of most of their collective bargaining rights. A judge last week halted implementation of the law after ruling the Senate did not give proper notice before voting on it, violating the state's open meeting law. That ruling was appealed Monday by the state Department of Justice.

A recurring theme during Kohl's remarks Monday was the need for Democrats and Republicans to cooperate. Kohl, a Democrat from Milwaukee, said the state and federal governments face tough budget issues, but he hopes politicians reach across the aisle and take measured approaches when crafting budget proposals. "You know you can't have it all your way," Kohl said. "You've got to have compromise."

Kohl did level some criticism at Walker, saying he disagrees with the governor's plans to overhaul SeniorCare, which helps low-income seniors buy prescription drugs. "This would effectively gut SeniorCare and end it," Kohl said of the proposed change. SeniorCare has helped 91,000 low income Wisconsin seniors buy drugs they need, and the program is cost effective because it negotiates for lower drug prices, Kohl said.

Afterward, Kohl said U.S. Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius must approve any changes to SeniorCare because they would require a federal waiver. Kohl said he believes Sebelius will look "skeptically" at Walker's proposal.

On another issue, Kohl said he supports the action taken by NATO forces in Libya and the U.S. involvement backing rebel groups he said are pursuing freedom like others in the Mideast.

Kohl, meanwhile, said Monday he has not thought much about whether he will run for reelection next year. He was first elected to the Senate in 1988.



Club President Elect **Sara Antonson** (left) and **Senator Herb Kohl**
