

Stop and Talk

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31

Wednesday, 20 October 2021 10:29 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 October 2021 10:46

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Sen. Smith writes about his “Stop & Talks”, one way he uses to get out and have conversations with residents throughout the 31st Senate District.

EAU CLAIRE - For many, a favorite thing to do this time of year is taking a drive to enjoy the natural beauty of our state. I often mention how fortunate we are in Wisconsin to have such a beautiful landscape all year-round, particularly now when the fall colors really draw attention and attract driving tours.

When asking folks to meet with their legislator, it's understandable why they're not too thrilled. Most people would prefer to be out-and-about, enjoying the beauty Wisconsin has to offer. When elected officials schedule office hours or listening sessions, it's not always convenient for folks. Usually they're scheduled in the town hall during business hours when people are at work. It always bothered me when I scheduled office hours and sat there alone waiting for someone to show up. It even felt like I was hiding while people drove by without knowing their elected representative was inside for them to talk to.

That never really sat right with me. Elected officials should be more accessible to their constituents. It should be as convenient and easy as possible for you to connect with your legislator. We should be where you are.

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That's why I constructed a 6 foot sign for the top of my 1999 Dodge Ram that I can fold down when driving, but then lift up for drivers to see when I'm parked in a place that they can easily pull into. It's your chance to Stop and Talk.



Although I'm not able to schedule mobile office hours every day, or even every week, I enjoy this way of connecting immensely. Even though I thought—like most of us—that I knew how to listen, I've honed my listening skills even more since being parked near the side of the road talking with constituents.

Life teaches us that building relationships is vitally important. Whether it's with family, colleagues or friends, relationships make life better. But relationships rely on trust. And that's where listening skills are necessary. If we only have conversations so we can be heard, then we're missing something. Nobody is 100% correct on everything; we can learn a lot from others if we really listen.

When asked what I enjoy most about my job as a Senator, the answer is always the same: listening to people's stories. I'm so privileged that people will share their most personal life stories with me. Some stories bring tears while others bring smiles. When I listen and learn from a personal story, we build that trust that forms a relationship. Even if it's brief, it is a relationship that impacts me as I work with my colleagues, vote on legislation and as I grow as a person.

If you haven't yet seen me on the road or wonder when and where the next Stop and Talk might be, here's how it works. I used to do Stop and Talks during my free time at the spur of the moment, but then there were many people who commented saying they wished they had known where I would be. Or they'd say they saw me, but were unable to stop because they were on a tight schedule.

Now we do a better job of scheduling when and where I'll be with my truck. The pandemic in 2020 impacted our ability to connect with people, but with vaccinations, face masks and social distancing, I'm out crisscrossing the district to hear from you.

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The best way to know when and where I'll be is by following me on my Facebook page @SenSmithWI. I'll usually post when and where I'll be a couples days in advance. Otherwise, when you're on that drive through western Wisconsin enjoying those fall colors, stop by when you see my big, red truck and share your thoughts. I look forward to listening to you.