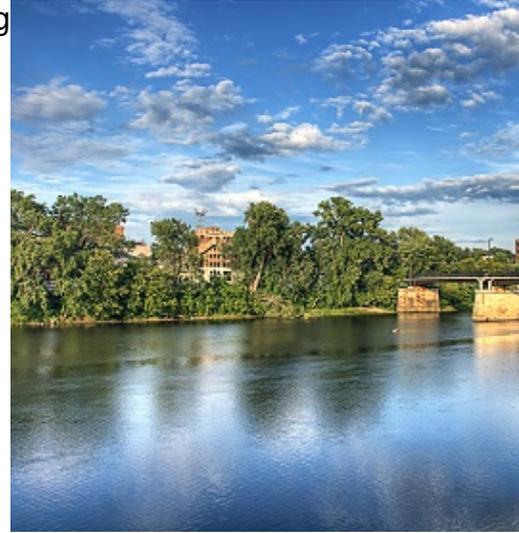


Listening with an Open Heart

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 18 October 2023 09:41 -

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Sen. Smith is embarking on his “Stop & Talks” tour of District 31 and announces his mobile office hours and schedule.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Fall is here – one of the most beautiful times of year in Wisconsin. If you choose the right day and take a drive through western Wisconsin, the colors are spectacular. Beautiful as they are, they don't last long while days grow shorter and the temperature gets colder.

Sadly for me, fall is also a sign that my “Stop and Talk” season is coming to a close. My “Stop and Talks,” or my mobile office hours, is the time when I park my old red truck near busy roads so people can stop by and share their thoughts quickly while they are on the go.

There is nothing about my job I enjoy more than having these personal one-on-one discussions. I learn so much from these talks. I am humbled by the willingness of my constituents to share their stories and concerns with me.

Some conversations may be considered bland, dry or just plain unimportant by some folks. Sometimes the smallest details are the ones that affect your life the most. The importance of collecting experiences and comparing notes cannot be downplayed, no matter how small the issue seems.

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Never assume that your story, or how a policy affects you, is obvious to me or anyone else. We all walk our own path and cannot ever fully understand someone else's. I have numerous examples of times a constituent has stopped to share their story with me and given me a new understanding of how a law has or may affect them and their neighbors. I rely on that information to inform my position on all the issues we address in the State Senate. I depend on these conversations in order to advocate for you effectively in the Wisconsin Legislature.

I wish all my constituents had the same opportunity I have to hear their neighbors' experiences and stories. These conversations are a constant reminder to me that nothing is as simple as it may seem from only one perspective. These conversations also allow me to share my experiences in state government and keep you informed of information I have access to that might not be as readily available to your average citizens.

Not every effort to understand another's viewpoint is easy, successful or changes hearts and minds. But we live in a democracy, and uniformity isn't our goal. The strength of our system of government relies on civil engagement as the first step to resolving inevitable conflicts.



I have spent many years in roles where I've represented my neighbors and their communities in local and state government. That's taught me that sometimes, listening does not come naturally. Listening is a learned skill that we have to work on and engage in with intention.

