Sen. Jeff Smith will hosting nine budget listening sessions in northwestern Wisconsin in March and April.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Ever since my two daughters were young and able to ice skate, I attended their figure skating practices and competitions. I’ve respected the work and dedication these young women put in for such an incredible sport. I became so interested that I started volunteering as the announcer for the Eau Claire Figure Skating Club competitions.

Competitive figure skating is mostly a solo sport. This changes however on the last day of the competition when many of the athletes get the opportunity to skate as a team. Synchronized skating has become a standalone competitive sport which adds that special team element to the skills they honed as solo artists. It's on that final day that I'm the announcer at the rink and introduce each team.

I’ve learned to appreciate the countless hours these young skaters put in with their coaches to perfect their spins, jumps, speed, and coordinating it all to music. Watching the perfect figure skating routine is the final product of hours of practice and countless falls and mishaps. There’s so much more than the few minutes the judges get to see on the ice including rivalry, high emotions, tears, and clashes in practice or the locker room.

I’ve found that description rings true for politics as well. There’s plenty of competition in the legislature as well as high emotions, disagreements, and tears at times. Certainly, it’s a rivalrous atmosphere with passionate individuals vying over sensitive issues.

At the end of the day, the young figure skaters put aside their craving for individual recognition to create a perfectly synchronized skating routine. I’m always amazed when they come together and create something great.

Just like a skater putting together a routine, Governor Evers put in his time practicing and training to perfect what he called the “People’s Budget.” Throughout this process, the Governor asked the people what he should include in his budget. To get suggestions, he hosted listening sessions in Superior, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Green Bay and Wausau.

As you can imagine, everyone has different ideas to move Wisconsin forward. Governor Evers embraced these diverse opinions and so do I. In the budget development phase, Governor Evers heard Wisconsin residents echo a few common ideas. Much of the suggestions revolved around affordable health care, roads that don’t bust up our cars, fully-funding public schools, and reforming our criminal justice system.

I will be hosting nine budget listening sessions to discuss Governor Evers’ biennial state budget proposal. I need you to be the judge for the Governor’s work on the People’s Budget, so please join me at one of the locations below.

Each budget listening session is from 5:30pm - 7:00pm and open to the public. Here are the details of our events:

- Thursday, March 21st: Whitehall - Whitehall Memorial High School

- Friday, March 22nd: Ellsworth - Ellsworth High School

- Monday, March 25th: Eau Claire - Joint Listening Session with Rep. Jodi Emerson - L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

- Thursday, March 28th: Holmen - Joint Listening Session with Sen. Jennifer Shilling and Rep. Steve Doyle - Holmen Public Library

- Thursday, April 11th: Durand - Durand City Hall

- Monday, April 15th: River Falls - Joint Listening Session with Sen. Patty Schachtner - River Falls Public Library

- Thursday, April 18th: Alma - Alma High School

- Tuesday, April 23rd: Menomonie - Joint Listening Session with Sen. Patty Schachtner at the Shirley Doane Senior Center

- Date is TBD: Black River Falls - Location is TBD

For more information, check out my website or Facebook page. I look forward to seeing you at one of these events. If you can’t make it to one of our listening sessions, please call, write or email me with any feedback about the budget.

The synchronized routine of 132 legislators trying to work together on the budget has just begun. It won’t be easy, but we rely on you to be the judge of how we work together.