

You Deserve Representation You Can Trust

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Senator Smith writes about the importance of the deliberative process of democracy and how vital it is that the public's representatives keep the trust given to them by their constituents.

MADISON - This week those of us elected by voters to represent you in various offices, including the State Legislature, take the oath of office to begin our service. The oath I gave, as stated in our Wisconsin constitution, went like this: *"I, Jeff Smith, swear that I will support the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Wisconsin, and will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties of the office of State Senate to the best of my ability. So help me God"*

Before the start of the first session day, all members elected this past November formally take that same oath in an honorable ceremony. On Inauguration Day, there is a lot of good feeling within the Capitol. It's a time of celebration and fellowship, surrounded by family and well-wishers. It is my hope that this feeling of camaraderie can last beyond that single day.

There is often disagreement on how to deliver on the promise of moving "Forward," as our

state motto says. Disagreement can be constructive when it leads to compromise, yielding decisions that make us a stronger state and union. When elected officials betray your trust and ignore our purpose of service, we find ourselves locked in partisan bickering that gets us nowhere.



In times where the people's elected representatives show little progress and voters don't see any agreement or compromise, it can be easy to lose the trust you may have had when you cast your ballot in November. In fact, it seems that the common belief is that it is normal for our elected bodies to only squabble and point fingers rather than work toward accomplishing anything.



When elected officials lie to constituents it reflects on every one of us. Take the egregious example happening in New York, where the person who won a congressional seat from Long Island lied about his education, religion, family background and more to get elected. Too often the reaction is to shrug, scowl and accept his behavior as normal. It is easy to become discouraged, falling into the expectation that you can't trust any legislator on the state or national level because they "all lie" anyway.

Of course it isn't fair to judge every person in elected office based on one miscreant. Too often we highlight exceptions to the rule, even when those exceptions are not representative of the vast majority. We hear about those who commit fraud, when most of us are honest and straightforward. It is those who do not behave as expected that get outsize coverage and social media shares. We don't get to know much about the people who just do what they were hired to do and stay out of trouble. It may even be the case in your workplace that one bad apple reflects badly on everyone else diligently doing their jobs.



I say all this so you might judge your elected officials from either side of the aisle with discretion and give us a chance to prove that most of us really do serve with good intent. At the same time, we have the opportunity at the start of a new session, right after we swore an oath to serve our state, to hold onto the trust you might have in our abilities to do the job expected of us.

That's why I'll do all I can to be open to legitimate and reasonable debate of ideas. Not all ideas are universally accepted as good ones. That is why ideas deserve a chance for public hearing and discussion. Once we start with that attitude, we may have a chance to hold onto the congeniality we felt on the first day we took our oath.

Thank you for your trust in me as your state senator. Throughout this year, I'll continue to update you on legislative happenings, and my door is always open. Email me at sen.smith@legis.wisconsin.gov, call my office at 608-266-8546 or drop in to the Capitol if you're in Madison. I hope to hear from you as we begin another year of working on behalf of you, the citizens of the great state of Wisconsin.

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