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Sen. Smith discusses his role on various task forces and how the legislature must be prepared to work as we move forward this legislative session.

MADISON - I find that participating in a task force or study group can be an eye opening and enriching experience that helps me grow as a person. Without better understanding an issue, state leaders can be flailing in the dark, but hearing from experts and reading about solutions that have worked in other states can help guide our work.

I serve on a couple of task forces. I think it's important that I learn as much as possible so I can find possible ideas to fix some of the greatest challenges we face as a state. Also, I love to learn.

A task force first studies an issue, then formulates policy solutions to share with the legislature to pass into law. That process should work, but it seems like we've reached a point where an issue has been identified and potential solutions continue to be shared over and over again. The legislature is slow to act on solutions, if they're introduced at all. We shouldn't continue revisiting the same issues we've studied before without taking meaningful action first.

Let's look at broadband, for example. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became even clearer that every household needed to be connected to high-speed internet. Running fiber to every

home and business would better situate us for times like this. Legislators, including myself, have studied this issue inside and out, up and down. Thanks also to the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, we know what needs to be done. We know that private providers aren't able to reach rural Americans without assistance from state and federal partners, like during the period of rural electrification in America. But here we are, still talking about it and delaying work that needs to get done.

The Dairy Task Force is the poster child for what can be wrong in Madison. Not only was there a task force that strategized how to save the industry in the 1980s, but in 2018 state leaders introduced Dairy Task Force 2.0. Although ideas came from both dairy task forces, the legislature has fallen far short of addressing the desperation that dairy farmers are feeling. It's a shame; our family farmers needed action yesterday. While the dairy industry is full of hands-on problem solvers, their hands are tied by political inaction.

While the creation of a task force is promising, they get mired down by politics. There are plenty of theories I could suggest as to why that's the case. First and foremost is political maneuvering. Some politicians get caught up in who get credit for solving the problem, and they prevent good ideas from moving forward.

Take the Water Quality Task Force, for example. In 2019 members toured the state, hearing from hundreds of experts and citizens. They introduced a package of bills that worked its way through the legislature, but didn't even "come close to wholly addressing prevention or help people gain access to the clean, safe water they deserve," according to Clean Wisconsin. To make matters worse, these proposals died on the floor when legislative leaders failed to schedule them for a vote. Once again, a task force was stifled by politics.

Similarly, the Climate Change Task Force presented a number of policy ideas to address what may be the most consequential challenge we, and our future generations, face. The governor included many of their recommendations in his 2021-23 budget proposal. Unfortunately, the Joint Finance Committee stripped them out and ignored the Task Force. Once again, no action.

We all want to be the person championing an issue, but we can't let that get in the way of doing our job serving Wisconsinites.

I'm currently serving on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force. We're hearing stories, understanding the issue and learning how to address this crisis. But once the task force ends its work, the legislature must act on our recommendations.

As legislators we're expected to do our jobs, and we should be prepared to work as we move forward this legislative session. Sure, being informed before taking any action is important. But taking no action at all is inexcusable.