

Trust is Complicated

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Sen. Jeff Smith writes about the importance of earned trust and doing one's own research before making conclusions.

BRUNSWICK, WI - I've learned a lot about building and holding one's trust, especially as an elected official. Trust can be elusive especially when the facts we find don't align with the rhetoric. When claims are verified with facts, trust is earned.

Trust can be puzzling too when it's given without any question or verification of facts. When we hear or read statements that align with our beliefs we might automatically trust the source. It's not earned, but we want it to be true.

Politics is all about trust. Earned and unearned.

My office receives constant emails proposing new ideas or legislation. Some are informed and original while many are generated from misinformation campaigns. It's common for groups to

send out messages warning anyone who is on their site or receive their emails about bills they don't like. They will have their own reasons. They may be legitimate reasons, but they may also be for selfish or political reasons.

Last week we heard a bill during a public hearing for the Committee on Utilities, Technology and Telecommunications. Senate Bill 838 was introduced by Republican members in the committee. In a nutshell, this proposal preserves Wisconsin's control over electric transmission decisions through the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, our state's regulators.

What does this have to do with trust? Before the public hearing folks were getting emails and seeing Facebook messages saying this bill would do terrible things. They were told their electric rates would go through the roof.

Trusting their source, folks put their names on form letters declaring their opposition to this bill and we needed to vote "no." They gave their trust without verification.

The reality is, there is no proof that rates will go up or have gone up in places that already passed similar legislation. My colleagues on the committee and I asked lots of questions. When asked if rates had been affected in other states, those opposed to the bill had to admit they hadn't.

Throughout the discussion we only got the usual conjecture and political ideology that led individuals testifying against the bill to believe that rate increases are inevitable. Oddly, they used the fact that rates have gone up around 10% over the last decade with no evidence it was caused by policies like this. The legislation being proposed is not current law and has nothing to do with rates during the past decade.

Building new transmission lines and the emerging infrastructure for the 21st Century is expensive. It gets more expensive with delays and missteps, which is what states have found when the bidding process is too loose and left to oversimplification. This bill prevents unnecessary costs and preserves what little control our state has over our energy needs.

Wisconsin's rates are high because these same groups that misled people last week misled people a decade ago when Wisconsin tried enacting legislation to produce our own renewable energy. Do we want to be at the mercy of out-of-state entities? It's already happening, but we can stop it now. This bill is a bi-partisan effort to preserve local control. We don't have enough of that cooperation in Madison these days.



I know it might be asking a lot of anyone, but it's wise to get both sides of an argument before handing over your trust. Better yet, every bill proposed has an analysis that is relatively easy to read and it's written by our non-partisan Legislative Reference Bureau.

Before posting cruel comments or lending your name to emails someone else has composed for you, take the time to look up the bill or ask questions of the bill authors.

Honesty and trustworthiness are fundamental to building relationships and accomplishing our goals. When trust is given without justification it is fragile and will often lead to a disappointing conclusion. Then, trust becomes even harder to earn.

When trust is earned it can be lasting and meaningful, but it must constantly be earned again and again. That's how it should be.

Trust is important. Don't give it up too easily.

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