

Committees, Collaboration and Compromise

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New State Senator Jeff Smith from western Wisconsin reports on the committee creation process, his appointments, and his experience working on each committee's issues.

MADISON - Senate committees aren't exactly the hottest topic to write about in state government, but it's incredibly important for our work as legislators. Most Senate committee names seem like someone pulled the topics out of a hat and randomly strung them together to create a committee.

Strange as some committee names may appear, committee creation is more an exercise in compromise and collaboration than blind luck.

Every two years, the Majority Party Leader meets with his or her Majority Party colleagues. He or she shuffles through the requests and interests of his or her Majority Party senators. Then he or she appoints committee chairs and assigns other Majority Party senators to the committees.

After the Majority Party organizes the committees, the Senate Minority Leader works with Minority Party Senators to fill the committees. Though seemingly monotonous, this cascade of

events can be a great opportunity for legislators to work together.



Every new legislator has priorities he or she is passionate about or has experience to contribute. Lesser known issues offer intrigue for new legislators. While we don't always get everything we want, I find every committee assignment an opportunity to learn and keep up on addressing new challenges.

We aren't experts in every field, but we were elected to use our best judgement when faced with decisions that affect a diverse population. Here's the slate of committees I will be assigned to this session:

Agriculture, Revenue & Financial Institutions: I will serve as ranking minority member on this committee. I may not be a farmer or banker by trade, but my forty-acre hobby farm and experience living in rural western Wisconsin offer me great insight. I learned an overwhelming amount about the banking industry during the Great Recession when I served on the Assembly Financial Institutions Committee as a State Representative. I'm looking forward to using that experience to help families work with lending institutions to purchase new homes and start businesses.

Elections, Ethics & Rural Issues: Since I first ran for elected office, campaign finance reform and ethics were my passion. That experience led me to serve as the Chair of this committee during my career in the State Assembly. My rural roots run deep. I've spent my whole life in western Wisconsin and the last 33 years living in the country, maintaining a septic system and private well while appreciating the real beauty of this state.

Government Operations, Technology & Consumer Protection: Consumer Protections are important now more than ever. During my time in the State Assembly I learned firsthand how important consumer protections were when I led efforts to regulate the payday industry and puppy mills. I also look forward to learning more about our state's government operations and our constantly evolving technology regulations.

Sporting Heritage, Mining & Forestry: This committee really gets to the heart of what I think will impact every generation to come. If we spoil the water, land and air around us there is no fixing it. We can make mistakes when dealing with most other issues, but we cannot afford to err when it comes to protecting our natural resources. As someone who grew up in the hunting heritage we are so proud of in Wisconsin, I find it even more urgent that we protect the resources that define our state.

While there may be plenty of other political distractions in the headlines for weeks to come, I hope our first job to create committees this session helps inspire a little hope that legislators can work together to build committees through collaboration and compromise.

With only 33 Senators working on so many issues I hope you play your part as an advocate, as an expert and as a citizen to help us pass bipartisan and commonsense legislation. Stay tuned for public hearings and other opportunities to make your voice heard as we work to make our state a great place to live generations to come.

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