What Are You Thankful For?

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Sen. Smith reflects on the amazing conversations he had and the lessons he learned during his first year representing the 31st Senate District.

BRUNSWICK, WI - We're nearing the end of another year and already getting ready for Thanksgiving. Everything seems to speed up during these last weeks as we prepare for the holiday season and the New Year. As we try to slow things down, we have time to reflect on and remember what we accomplished this year and ask ourselves what we're thankful for.

Personally, I have many reasons to be grateful. Barely a year ago, I was elected as your state senator, something I'm eternally grateful for. In the past year, I've had the opportunity to meet and learn from community members and connect with legislators from across the state and country. While reflecting on the year and anticipating the time ahead, we must remember to listen, respect and learn. Let's all do our best to build relationships and develop trust to make our state the place we want to leave for our children and future generations.

Learning really is a lifelong experience. Serving as your senator, I'm given more opportunities to learn than most people get. My personal style of listening evolved, allowing me to be outdoors

and visible to constituents. During the week, I'd take out my truck and park, hoist up my flags and the Stop 'n Talk sign and invite anyone to have a conversation. My mobile office hours offered the opportunity for folks to talk as they headed home from work or on the way to an event.



I'm thankful for all of the amazing advocates who visited me in my office or on the streets and shared personal stories, experiences and lessons. You can visit my Facebook page and find pictures and descriptions from many of my Stop 'n Talks.

When I'm not in the district, I also have the fortunate opportunity to learn from Capitol colleagues, staff, statewide advocates and people serving in other parts of our great Nation. This past year, I met with community leaders at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) annual Legislative Summit and the NCSL Broadband and Cable Policy Summit. In fact, these were the best opportunities I had to mingle with legislators from the other side of the aisle. These learning opportunities make me a more knowledgeable and well-rounded representative for you. I'm thankful for any opportunity to listen and learn other perspectives and ideologies.

Although I had incredible experiences, this year also presented some challenges. After all, before I was even sworn in, Republicans passed new laws in a lame duck session that limited the powers of the governor and attorney general. It wasn't a good start to the 2019 legislative session and the Republican's failure to work with us hasn't improved.

There's more to be grateful for than the challenges that set us back. We must remember to rise above and remember everything we are grateful for. I'm truly thankful for shared governance. After all, democracy was always meant to be a shared style representing the people. This was Wisconsin's first attempt at shared governance since 2008. In 2009-10 Democrats had the governor's office and majorities in both houses and Republicans had the same from 2011 until this year.

Let's be thankful for the prospect of shared governance and a new opportunity to work together. Hopefully by next Thanksgiving, I can share there's been more opportunity to build relationships and trust with colleagues from the other side of the aisle.

Thanksgiving means different things to different people. It’s a time when we get together with family and friends. Maybe it’s a time for others to get away from those family and friends or the obnoxious uncle pushing political views at the Thanksgiving table. We need to come together and appreciate our commonalities and celebrate this unifying tradition. It’s called Thanksgiving for a reason – giving is how we pay forward, while we give thanks for what has been passed on to us.

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