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Sen. Smith writes about learning opportunities like the Senate Scholar Program and internships that provide young people with the skills to take the baton from the older generation.

MADISON - The number of times I've heard people say, "We need to help young people engage in our community," or "We need more young people in politics" is so common I won't even venture to guess. It's almost inevitable someone will say something like that at every meeting I attend.

It really hasn't changed. As someone who grew up through the 1960s and 70s, adults regularly complained about young people engaged in peace, love and rock 'n roll. Adults were sure the next generation was a lost cause and young people couldn't care less about their community.

And I'm sure the generation before had the same concerns for their children.

Of course, their fears weren't founded in fact. My generation was inspired by the generations before even if we didn't admit it. As a Baby Boomer, I took lessons from the "Greatest Generation" – the ones who made it through the Great Depression and World War II.

Our democracy depends on each generation inspiring the next. Our patriotism becomes stronger through each generations' contributions to our country.

Some have heard me say this before; we're the surrogates for young people. They will take over when they're ready. Just like my generation and every generation before, we're caretakers for the next generation. The new generation is creating its own identity. Careers are established, families are grown and communities are transformed. That's how it's always worked.

Our greatest responsibility is what we leave for our next generation. How do we create new opportunities and be good stewards of our natural resources? How will future generations judge our actions? Like anyone, we've stumbled at times in this race, but all that really matters is if we can hand off the baton without losing too much ground.

Last week, we hosted a group of students as Senate Scholars at the State Capitol. Several times each year, high school students across Wisconsin participate in this week-long program to learn more about state government.

Depending on what's going on during the week, students become familiarized with all the different processes in the Capitol. They get an opportunity to staff the Senate floor when we're in session, visit the Governor's residence and go through the lawmaking process with mock legislation. They learn about the media, legislative staff, lobbyists and legislative agency support staff.

I crossed paths throughout our busy week with a young man named Michael, a Senate Scholar from Eau Claire. It wasn't until Thursday, I was able to spend some time getting to know him and find out what he learned during his week-long experience.

Michael was inquisitive and attentive, learning all he could about the state government process. This young man's visit to my office renewed my hope for our future generation. Like so many young people I meet, this experience left me with real certainty that our youth will be ready to lead when the time comes.

If you are a 16-18 year old high school student, or your son or daughter wants to learn more, I strongly encourage you to consider the Senate Scholar Program. Check out the website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/ssgt/senatescholar to learn more about program eligibility requirements and the curriculum.

Dr. Tammy Wehrle, the Legislative Education and Outreach Officer for the Senate is an incredible asset for the Senate. She can help answer questions about the program. You can reach out to her at **608-261-0533** for more information.

If you're looking for a more in-depth look at the state legislature, we offer unpaid internships to college students and recent graduates. Interns have a chance to research policy and provide information to constituents. They also have the opportunity to attend committee hearings and participate at events in the district. Visit www.legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/31/smith/quick-links/intern-with-me to learn more about this program or to apply.

Opportunities like the Senate Scholar Program and internships give our next generation a glimpse of how government works. Our hope is for students participating in this program become the future leaders of our state and nation. I'm confident we will be in good hands if we keep supporting and building up our next generation through learning opportunities as Senate Scholars and interns.