

## You Can Be a Citizen Lobbyist

Posted on Mar 06, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



***Senator Smith breaks down his past two weeks of meetings filled with citizens from all walks of life and stresses the importance of sharing real life experience to improve our state.***

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MADISON - A typical week in our Madison office includes meetings with constituents who drive to Madison to advocate for organizations spanning all sorts of topics they are concerned about. In person meetings in the Capitol with citizens from the 31<sup>st</sup> Senate District are always uplifting and educational for me.

Oftentimes organizations will dedicate an annual lobby day for their members to visit the Capitol and educate legislators like me. In the last two weeks of February alone we hosted visitors for Dairy Business Day, the American Planners Association Day, Wisconsin Beverage Association Day and Nurses Day at the Capitol.

We also met with citizens representing the Association of Independent Colleges, the American Council of Engineering Companies, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin over the course of three days.

Other meetings peppered throughout the week included students from UW River Falls and Altoona High School, River Falls Chamber of Commerce members, Carpenters Union members and ABATE of Wisconsin advocating for motorcycle riders rights. Again, all those groups and individuals met in-person with me in my office during the last two weeks.

No two meetings are the same, and each group brings at least 2-3 different topics to discuss. It's a lot of juggling to squeeze everyone into the schedule and it's incredible to learn the amount of information I gather from citizen lobbyists.



On top of those previously mentioned meetings was the annual Chippewa Valley Rally last Wednesday. Every year area chambers of commerce have their own special advocacy day to promote their region or city. There's Central Wisconsin Days and Superior Days, for instance. But, for me, it's a source of pride when so many excellent advocates from the Chippewa Valley take over the halls of the Capitol for one day and lobby my colleagues about our region. This year there were 124 people wearing the familiar Chippewa Valley Rally scarves talking to legislators and staff from all over the state. It makes a great impression.

Citizen lobbying is still the most valuable and inspiring form of advocacy we have. During the course of the year, thousands of citizens visit their Capitol building to speak to their legislators. Some come as individuals representing themselves while others attend with a large group.

While it may work well for some to drive to Madison to lobby us, it isn't possible for most people. Their form of lobbying shows up in our mailbox or by telephone. That's incredibly impactful, particularly if the letter or email is composed by the individual rather than a form-generated email.



What many people may not realize is that our office is really an office of constituent service. People call us when they have difficulties navigating a state agency or service. It could be someone needing answers about Medicaid or unemployment insurance. It could be questions for the Department of Workforce Development about layoffs or information about apprenticeship programs. Or, when in need, we can connect people to the Office of Commissioner of Insurance about flood insurance or the Department of Safety and Professional Services about getting a professional license. The staff in my office spend much of their time connecting people to the professionals that can help.

As your State Senator, I appreciate everyone from all walks of life informing me about your hard earned life experience and finding ways to improve our state. There's nothing more valuable than sharing real life experience.

We can accommodate groups of any size. We had 24 nurses for their advocacy day while one doctor of pediatrics met with me to lay out their needs for state support. Some larger meetings we move to a conference room while most we can handle in our office. There's no meeting too small or too large when it comes to ordinary citizens sharing their stories.

We like to say that the Capitol is the People's House for a reason. Even if you just happen to be visiting for fun we welcome you to stop in our office in room 19 South, meet the staff and give a few words of advice. We're there to listen and learn.

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*Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District*

*includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.*

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