

You Can Be a Citizen Lobbyist

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 06 March 2024 10:16

<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/high-voltage-lines-farms-s450.jpg>



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.

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 31st 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

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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.

