

Jeff Smith - Let's Finish What We Started

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 08 January 2020 10:24 -

<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/capitol-crowd-wi.jpg>



Sen. Smith writes about issues to prioritize going forward, including Medicaid expansion and gun safety reform. In 2019, we saw a glimpse of what compromise looks like and he's hopeful we can all come to the table to finish what we started.

BRUNSWICK, WI - During this time of year, we're surrounded by reminders to set goals for the next twelve months and fulfill our New Year's resolutions. As the weeks pass by, we typically find ourselves falling back into our old habits and routines. Once we slip up, it may seem like our resolutions are hopeless and we push off our goals to next year.

While preparing to head back to Madison, I thought about small, yet realistic intentions to continually motivate me in this New Year. Step by step, I'm hopeful these intentions will guide me to put differences aside and finish what we started in 2019.

To begin, I'm determined to stay away from holding grudges and I'll encourage others to do the same.

Of course, we won't suddenly lock arms and sing "Kumbaya." After all, I wouldn't expect anyone to turn their back on their own personal values or beliefs. The basic principle of our political system brings two separate parties with at least two ideas to the table to solve any problem. That's the standard most citizens expect and hope for from their elected officials.

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I intend to follow through on this expectation while advocating for policies to support all Wisconsinites. In the last year, I heard from constituents over and over about the necessity and urgency of expanding Medicaid to improve healthcare affordability for Wisconsinites. Medicaid expansion will also save our state more than \$300 million to later re-invest back into essential health programs. With 62% of Wisconsinites supporting this proposal, Medicaid expansion must be a top priority.

I'll continue advocating for commonsense gun safety measures. Last year, my Democratic colleagues introduced legislation to implement universal background checks and extreme risk protection orders to remove firearms from individuals who may be suffering from a mental illness and present a danger to themselves or others. These lifesaving proposals, supported by more than 80% of Wisconsinites, still haven't moved forward, even though Governor Evers called a special session to debate and vote on the bills.

I intend to find common ground so we can have a civil discussion to find solutions we can agree on. Considering the overwhelming support from Wisconsin residents on these ideas, I hope my colleagues can come to the table and do the right thing.

The effort to gather together isn't futile – there's hope for more compromise in 2020. Last year, there were signs that legislators could find themselves in agreement, in principle, on some major issues. I was pleased and surprised to see legislation introduced by Republicans mirroring bills that had previously been introduced by Democrats. The most prominent examples that jumped out included contraception accessibility and medical marijuana legalization.

Earlier in the year, Republicans introduced Senate Bill 286, which would allow pharmacists to sell contraceptives to customers over the age of 18 without a doctor's prescription. I was impressed to hear one Republican author identify the hurdles that existed for women to access contraceptives as a primary reason for introducing this legislation. This may be one area we can finally break through and have a civil conversation about women's health and access to birth control.

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Recently, two Republican legislators introduced a version of a bill to legalize medical marijuana. Though it was quickly criticized by their own leaders, it gave many hope that the conversation could be resurrected and not take a partisan stance like it's been in the past. I applaud this effort and others that give us a glimpse at what might be.

In 2020, I will keep fighting for the issues that matter most to Wisconsinites. My Republican colleagues have begun to show they're capable of recognizing the challenges Wisconsinites face. Now we need them to act on Medicaid expansion and gun safety reform. Let's all hope that 2020 brings us closer to the type of shared governance that most of us wish for and expect so we can finish what we started.