

## **Bryon Eagon's Contract With Students**

### *A Plan to Remain Accountable to Students*

In my conversation with students across District 8 I have to come to realize one of the fundamental difficulties in representing the area on the Madison Common Council is the disconnect between its residents and local issues. Most students have a vague understanding of the way Madison functions: there is a Mayor with a hard to spell last name, quite a few have connected the dots as I meet them that I am running for Eli Judge's seat, and all of them have some story about an issue the Council can regulate such as a bad landlord, something to do with the police, or a run in with crime in the downtown and campus area. Away from local government, these students generally have a broader understanding of their state and federal government leaders, something we would all expect given their coverage in the news and our mandatory K-12 civics classes all across the country.

Because of this low threshold of knowledge I have found between students and the broader Madison community, it is difficult to be an effective representative of the student district without advancing suggestions to make the position more accountable and visible to the campus area population. While I applaud Eli Judge's efforts in raising the visibility of the position and his commitment to being the Alder of students, not other interest groups, I seek to improve on his current structure of leadership with these proposals. I am calling it my "Contract With Students" and I hope if elected, the campus

area media and student population will hold me to these commitments. With so many pressing issues facing the student population, we cannot afford to elect leadership that puts student issues on the backburner and sees the position as a burden or secondary concern in their life. I would be personally ashamed if I ran for office and did not give it my full attention and as a result, I hope people do hold me accountable to this contract.

**Along with my substantial policy suggestions found in other documents and on my website and literature, I will make raising the visibility of the District 8 Alder position one of the central tenants of my agenda.**

### **Therefore, I pledge the following:**

#### **Students come first.**

Plain and simple: I am accountable to students above all else. Student concerns take the front seat to my personal political beliefs and the interest of special groups. While I recognize some issues lack a specific student opinion, I will make it my mission to consider what students want as the most important decision when looking at an issue. Students comprise somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 people in the city of Madison, yet generally speaking, we have just one of twenty seats on the Common Council. I personally see students as an underrepresented group in the city given our sheer size and amount of economic power we bring into the city. We help give this city life. **I will not let Madison ever forget this** when we deliberate policies that may not have the interest of students in mind.

## **I will push for the first ever *Madison Student Census*.**

One of the most important steps the 8<sup>th</sup> District Alder can take before making any sort of commitment to staying accountable is understanding what the District wants and needs. While all candidates for this position will meet with students and hear their concerns, all historical evidence suggests less than a quarter of eligible students typically vote in these local elections. Therefore, questions about whether to hold “Alder Hours”, should they be held in specific parts of the 8<sup>th</sup> District, and what type of outreach should be done, should be secondary to the larger issue: **What are students thinking?**

I have given this a lot of thought and believe the first step is an innovative approach that I would pioneer on campus -- we need to complete a “Student Census”. This will be modeled off Madison’s resident satisfaction survey, which was just completed for the first time.<sup>1</sup> But something was missing. Students. We were not polled in this survey. That is understandable because of the transient nature of the student population which leaves every few years, but we are nearly a quarter of the city population! There must be a better way to include us in the discussion.

In this satisfaction survey various city agencies and programs were rated by the population of Madison, showing that residents of the city are quite pleased with the area. I would ask the city include students in the next version, but make a specific student /downtown resident form. I would work closely with the UW-Madison student leaders, the Dean of Students Office, and other downtown Alders to construct the questionnaire. It would not be complex, but ask a series of questions on how safe students feel, what city

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wispolitics.com/index.html?Article=145655>

services they understand exist, how much they know about the Common Council, if there are specific issues they would like to see addressed, and so forth. I would make it as open of a process as possible, bringing in all voices to build a wide coalition to make the creation of this census document as transparent as possible.

In addition, I do not mean to explicitly single out non-students of the 8<sup>th</sup> District or other areas of the campus not in the 8<sup>th</sup> District, so I would work with all campus and downtown area alders to initiation this census. Students are 98% of District 8, so I feel confident calling this a “Student Census”, but welcome non-students living in the area to also complete the questionnaire because its questions really do not matter if you are a student, but rather what you want to see changed in the local community.

The costs of such a survey are incredibly low (printing, stamps, and envelopes would be a minor cost) and I am confident at the least UW-Madison and the city could find a way to jointly-fund a few hundred dollars to make this happen. If this will not happen, there are several business organization downtown like Downtown Madison Inc. (DMI) and the Madison Business Improvement District (BID) that I could lobby for a small amount of funding to cover costs. For data collection purposes, the city staff that calculated the tens of thousands of responses from the city-wide Madison questionnaire in 2008 would be asked to handle the student and downtown responses. With several months to calculate the data, it should alleviate any time constraints and avoid unnecessary amounts of overtime required of city staff.

I also recognize this is not a perfect barometer of what students are thinking. Some would throw the documents out and others might not coherently explain what issues they care about, **but that does not mean we should not try.** This has never been

tried before and I think it is backwards for me to suggest specific ways I would meet with students without some data to guide this practice. However, I am confident with some serious effort put forth by the city and University – perhaps having the Chancellor and Mayor send out an e-mail and using University Communications to stress the importance of such a questionnaire, we could see a rise in the responses returned. I would also work with the Student Organization Office to promote the document to UW-Madison’s several hundred student organizations. This would help reach a wide audience in numerous different ways. In an honest assessment, I think we could get 20-50% of the documents back in our first try if given the right amount of effort. With several thousand documents, there would be a far more coherent picture of what students are thinking and want than ever produced before. To me, this would be a victory and sets a precedent in the future where students are asked to invest a tiny amount of time to participate in their local government.

### **I will hold regularly scheduled Alder Hours.**

One of the major successes of Ald. Eli Judge’s tenure was the creation of Alder Hours where anyone with a problem could find him at a central location to discuss local issues. Hundreds of students and community residents have met with Ald. Judge over the years to bring up their concerns and have questions answered. I would continue this process. In my eyes, these hours are not meant to be proactive – I will have other strategies to directly reach out to students, but like Office Hours for a TA, it is a public forum for me to be reachable and provide some visibility for the position.

## **I will hold listening sessions that target the diverse groups comprising District 8.**

The 8<sup>th</sup> District is not one cohesive unit. In some areas there are freshmen living in dormitories, in others we find much of the Greek Community, and apartments/houses scattered in between. This makes it fairly difficult to stay connected with everyone because the age groups and housing arrangements of the area. Originally, I thought holding “ward specific” listening sessions would be appropriate, where I would meet with the four different wards of District 8 in a regularly scheduled pattern. Instead, I would target specific groups and buildings to hold sessions, perhaps once a semester.

In practice, this would involve going to Greek houses and speaking at their chapter meetings, visiting the local co-op housing, having the dormitories in the District send out information to the students living in UW Housing that anyone with a city-related problem should go to a schedule meeting in Gordon Commons or the basement of their building, and working with various organizations to which residents of the area are members. On Langdon Street this might mean having a listening session at the new Hillel or posting signs about an upcoming session near the ever popular MacTaggarts Market. By the Spring Street area, I might go door-to-door to organize a listening session that might be hosted at the UW-Madison Welcome Center near Smith Hall. The point is that I will not just sit and wait for students to approach me during Alder Hours, but also proactively raise visibility regarding the position through regular listening sessions during the semesters when students are in class and of course an adjusted schedule during the summer months when much of District 8 has left the area.

**I will meet with an array of student organizations on a regular basis, especially non-political groups and those I may not necessarily agree with.**

Thousands of students share one thing in common: they are involved with at least one student organization on campus. Not everyone in District 8 is involved with a registered student organization and I recognize this, but it is one of the best aggregates of students into one location (spatially speaking or through sheer size) outside of a Badger game and some large Facebook groups. Thus, I see these student organizations as a great medium through which I can communicate the importance of the City Council's work on the student body, raise visibility of the position, and hear about student concerns.

This is not necessarily a novel idea. Every student elected to a local public office seems to meet with at least one student group, especially political organizations. This is understandable. The organizations are vital to their political strength, offering them volunteers, campaign staff, and support in times of need. But it is not enough. There are hundreds of student organizations with members in the 8<sup>th</sup> District not in political groups. Engineers Without Borders, the UW Madison Greek Community, the Student Nurses' Association, the Entrepreneurship Association – the list is nearly endless. They might not specifically be political like the College Democrats, College Republicans, Progressive Dane, etc., but they have the most important component: residents of the campus and downtown area, particularly District 8 which is very student-centric. Therefore, I will seek out groups consistently left out of the local political cycle where a representative wins a seat then only consults with the political organization that elected them. This

might mean attending a large, but non political student organization meeting every few months to speak, asking student organization leaders to forward on my Alder Hours schedule, and just in general making a commitment to seeking out a diverse array of student groups in my attempt to stay connected with the student body. Surely, I will be unable to attend several hundred student organization meetings each semester and I am not promising an unachievable amount of outreach, but I will absolutely make it a central commitment in my efforts to stay accountable to the student body.

While this does not mean I will abandon going to my College Democrat meetings, it does mean I am committed not only to seeking out less represented student organizations in the local political process, but also consulting political and advocacy groups that may not support me in my campaign this spring. At the end of the day, we are all residents of the Madison and want to see the area succeed. While we may not always agree, it is extremely important I serve as a deliberative leader of the student voice, not just a knee-jerk political actor serving the interests of a select few.

**I will continue Ald. Eli Judge’s practice of “house calls” where I show up at the door of residents to walk them through problems.**

One of the lesser known successes of Ald. Judge was his practice of making “house calls” where students would have a problem relating to a landlord or the city and he would personally visit their residence to help. This included walking a student through their rights as a tenant, assisting a house on Langdon Street with a trash pick up problem, and most notably his on the spot immediate response during the Sig Ep fire last spring.

Ald. Judge remained committed to students, 24/7 and was there in an emergency. I will not change this practice and hope through my out reach efforts that students will consult me in the same way. I certainly do not mind knocking on doors – a skill I am honing through this election – and being unafraid to talk and meet with students I do not know will serve me well trying to be as connected to the student body as Ald. Judge has been.

**I pledge to continue having an online presence through a website, blog, and social-networking sites.**

It is important for there to be a space for the 8<sup>th</sup> District representative to communicate their positions. As I have already done during the campaign, I will use new communication mediums to reach out to students. While I recognize only a few hundred – maybe a thousand on a good post – will view my material, I want to actively keep the option out there, where an interested student can directly hear my thoughts if they are curious about my positions. I will also use social-networking sites like Facebook to reach out to students, whether it is seeking advice on a policy issue, looking for new student organizations to meet with, or promoting upcoming listening sessions. Interactive and online communication is the new wave of political media as I am learning in my Communication Arts classes and I certainly do not intend to hide from this transformation of information sharing.