Highlights from the New 118th Congress Legislative Effectiveness Scores

Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, Co-Directors, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LES) for the recently completed 118th Congress (2023-25). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We list the top-10 lawmakers in each party in the House and Senate, including many who continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous congress.
- We note those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious "Exceeds Expectations" category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We offer evidence that effective lawmaking continued, despite divided government and internal struggles within closely divided chambers.
- The pattern of behind-the-scenes lawmaking continued, with bill language modified and attached to must-pass legislation, such as omnibus appropriations packages and the National Defense Authorization Acts.
- Whether as stand-alone bills or part of larger legislative vehicles, we find many paths to successful lawmaking – traditional lawmaking successes by committee and subcommittee chairs, innovative proposals by liberal-leaning and conservative lawmakers alike, and moderates working with party leaders to advance their proposals as policy riders.
- The lawmaking capacity of Congress may be strained for a variety of reasons in the years ahead, including due to many of the high-performing lawmakers listed here losing their elections, winning elections to state-level office, moving into the administration, or retiring.

Introduction and Methodology

As in all previous releases, the Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of Congress sponsors, how far they move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House and the Senate. More on our methodology can be found here.

Each legislator's LES can be found here. For each member of the House and Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average effectiveness of lawmakers who share that

legislator's majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee or subcommittee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe lawmakers on a more level playing field. For example, in the 118th House, minority-party lawmakers had an average LES of 0.55, compared to 1.44 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average of 2.47. In the more-egalitarian Senate, those averages were 0.88 in the minority party, 1.11 in the majority party, and 1.51 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as "Exceeding Expectations" for those outperforming their benchmark by 50% or more, "Below Expectations" for those below 50% of their benchmark, and "Meeting Expectations" for those scoring near their benchmark.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member from first to last. This ranking is used to generate the Top Ten lists highlighted in the tables below. Given the strong benefit from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Congress together would be inappropriate. But these comparisons within each party are quite informative.[1]

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 118th House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top ten highest-scorers in the 118th House of Representatives among majority-party Republicans. Unsurprisingly, given the power of committee and subcommittee chairs, seven of the top ten held such important positions.

Topping our list is Rep. Sam Graves of Missouri, with a Legislative Effectiveness Score nearly seven times the average member of the House. Rep. Graves was Chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 118th Congress, where he was serving his 12th term. He sponsored 17 bills, 8 of which passed the House, and 4 of which became law as stand-alone measures. In contrast, the average member of the House sponsored nearly 23 bills, with less than 1 law produced for every two House members. In addition to sponsoring the *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024* and several related bills that all became stand-alone laws, Rep. Graves was also the sponsor of two bills, the *Water Resources Development Act of 2024*, and the *E-BRIDGE Act*, both of which had their language substantially incorporated into the *Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024*, which was signed into law in January 2025; and he also sponsored the *Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2023*, which was incorporated in large part into the *Continuing Appropriations Act of 2024*, which became law in September 2023.

In addition to using his position as committee chair to advance numerous pieces of legislation in the 118th Congress, Rep. Graves's ranking as a highly effective lawmaker continues a pattern of legislative engagement that he established in the previous (117th) Congress, where he was in our "Exceeds Expectations" grouping among minority party (Republican) lawmakers.

---

[1] For the 118th Congress, we extend our methodology to give credit for joint resolutions (H.J.Res. and S.J.Res.) in addition to public bills studied previously (H.R. and S.). We continue to use the innovations we created for the 117th Congress, giving bill sponsors credit for the later stages of the lawmaking process when substantial portions of their bills are included in other vehicles that become law. Finally, for the unique instance in which Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ) introduced 521 funding bills on March 29, 2023, none of which progressed through any later stage, we simply count those as a single bill in the Government Operations issue area.

Top Ten List—House Republicans (118th Congress)

	Name	LES	Chair Position
1.	**Sam Graves (MO-6)**	6.793	Committee Chair
2.	**Don Bacon (NE-2)**	6.001	None
3.	**Tom Cole (OK-4)**	5.414	Committee Chair
4.	**Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-5)**	4.924	Committee Chair
5.	**John Curtis (UT-3)**	4.293	None
6.	**Michael Lawler (NY-17)**	4.152	None
7.	**Marcus Molinaro (NY-19)**	3.951	Subcommittee Chair
8.	**Young Kim (CA-40)**	3.915	Subcommittee Chair
9.	**French Hill (AR-2)**	3.866	Subcommittee Chair
10.	**Jason Smith (MO-8)**	3.705	Committee Chair

Coming in as the second-most effective lawmaker was Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska, who introduced 59 bills into the 118th Congress. Similar to his experiences in the 117th Congress, at first glance, it would appear that Rep. Bacon's success in advancing his agenda was limited, given that only one of the 59 bills that he sponsored passed the House, and none of them became law. A deeper consideration of his legislative engagement, however, reveals that Rep. Bacon was very successful at navigating the legislative process to ensure that the content of his sponsored bills were incorporated into other measures that ultimately became law. More specifically, we are able to identify 11 bills that Rep. Bacon introduced into the House that had their language substantially incorporated into other bills that became law, including the *Strategic Defense Fellows Act of 2023*, the *Fighter Force Preservation Act of 2023*, the *Multipolar Deterrence Research and Analysis Act of 2023*, the *Sentinel Program Risk Mitigation Act of 2023* and two other bills that were incorporated into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*. Rep. Bacon's approach to lawmaking, working behind the scenes to advance his bills through the legislative process in others' vehicles, is consistent with a pattern of behavior that we first identified in our analysis of the 117th Congress, where Rep. Bacon was the most effective Republican lawmaker in the U.S. House, and the fourth-most effective lawmaker overall in the House, despite being a member of the minority party.

Chairing the House Rules Committee, and the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Representative Tom Cole of Oklahoma was the third-highest scoring member of the Republican Party in the 118th Congress. He introduced 20 bills, and saw two of them ultimately become law, including the *American Relief Act of 2025*, and the *Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act of 2025*.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington was the fourth-highest scoring Republican lawmaker in the 118th Congress, where she served as the chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee. In finding her way onto the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the House, Rep. Rodgers continued a pattern of achievement where she has been in our "Exceeds

Expectations" category for three of the preceding five congresses (113th, 115th, and 116th). In the 118th Congress, Rep. Rodgers introduced 33 bills, 8 of which passed the House, and 2 of which ultimately became law. Her sponsored bills engaged with a wide range of policy areas, including natural resources, veterans' affairs, and energy policy. In addition to the two standalone bills that she introduced that became law, the *Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act*, and an emergency supplemental appropriations bill, Rep. Rodgers saw a substantial portion of the language in one of her sponsored bills, the *MARITIME Act of 2023*, incorporated into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*.

Rep. John Curtis of Utah rounded out the top five most-effective Republican lawmakers in the 118th Congress, for his final term in the U.S. House before being elected to serve in the Senate in the 119th Congress. Despite lacking a committee or subcommittee chair, Rep. Curtis sponsored 48 bills, three of which became law, including the *Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act*, and the *Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act*. He also succeeded in having substantial portions of the language in two of his sponsored bills, the *Advanced Nuclear Reactor Prize Act*, and the *Connect our Parks Act*, incorporated into other measures that became law. These successes in advancing his agenda are consistent with his past patterns of lawmaking effectiveness, where he had been categorized as being "above expectations" in the 116th and 117th Congresses.

Although the four committee chairs in our top-10 list certainly performed well in lawmaking, we see that a downward trend in the lawmaking effectiveness of committee chairs that we first identified in our analysis of the 116th Congress has continued to hold. On average, each committee chair in the 118th Congress saw only one of their sponsored bills become law. This rate of 1.05 laws per chair is even lower than what we documented in our analysis of the 117th Congress, which (up until then) had been the lowest across all of the Congresses that we have studied (since 1973). As we have noted in past analyses, this trend offers further evidence of the declining influence of committees that began with reforms in the mid-1990s to centralize power in the majority party leadership, a shift that [undermined expertise and effective lawmaking](#) for the Congress as a whole.

While nearly all of the remaining top 10 Republican lawmakers held a committee or subcommittee chair, one notable exception is Rep. Michael Lawler of New York, who was a newly elected freshman member of Congress in the 118th Congress. Of the 58 bills that he introduced, he saw 7 of them pass the House, one of them become law, and the language from another of his sponsored bills incorporated into a different measure that ultimately became law. Another freshman legislator on the top-10 Republican list is Rep. Marcus Molinaro of New York, who sponsored 45 bills, 9 of which passed the House, and two of which became law. Similar to Rep. Lawler, Rep. Molinaro was also successful at navigating the legislative process so that substantial portions of language from two of his sponsored bills were incorporated into other bills that became law. Rep. Lawler's and Rep. Molinaro's records of legislative success were notably stronger than the average freshman in the 118th Congress who introduced fewer than 20 bills, saw fewer than 2 of them pass the House, and saw less than one of their bills (on average) become law.

For Rep. French Hill, although he was unsuccessful at advancing any of his sponsored bills through the legislative process to become stand-alone laws, he did succeed in inserting substantial portions of the language from four of his sponsored bills into different appropriations bills (that became

law) and the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*. Finally, for Rep. Jason Smith and Rep. Young Kim, we see that many of their legislative successes were tied to bills that fell under the jurisdictions of committees on which they held seats, a common pattern among chairs.

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 118th House of Representatives

Turning to the Democratic side of the aisle, the table below lists the most effective Democratic lawmakers in the 118th House. It also shows whether they tend to be ideologically moderate or liberal in their voting patterns on the floor of the House, in comparison to other Democratic members.[2]

The ideology metric demonstrates that the majority of the top 10 Democratic lawmakers (seven out of ten) are more liberal than their party's median member. In other words, even more liberal-leaning Democratic Representatives—while serving in the minority party—can clearly be effective at lawmaking. It is also worth noting that six of the nine returning members from the Democratic "top ten" list are members of the Progressive Caucus or New Democrat Coalition. The fact that these caucus members were all among the most effective Democratic lawmakers in the 118th Congress is consistent with research that points to the enhanced lawmaking effectiveness of Representatives who belong to intraparty ideological caucuses when they are in the minority party.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (118th Congress)

	Name	**LES**	**Ideology**
1.	**Joaquin Castro (TX-20)**	4.700	Liberal
2.	**Joe Neguse (CO-2)**	4.162	Liberal
3.	**Dina Titus (NV-1)**	2.362	Moderate
4.	**Gregory Meeks (NY-5)**	1.991	Liberal
5.	**Steve Cohen (TN-9)**	1.834	Liberal
6.	**Frank Pallone (NJ-6)**	1.693	Liberal
7.	**Lucy McBath (GA-7)**	1.548	Moderate
8.	**Katie Porter (CA-47)**	1.518	Moderate
9.	**Jill Tokuda (HI-2)**	1.514	Liberal
10.	**Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)**	1.510	Liberal

At the top of the list, we see Rep. Joaquin Castro of Texas, who introduced 30 bills into the 118th Congress. Similar to the experiences of Rep. Don Bacon, the scope of Rep. Castro's success in navigating the lawmaking process seems quite limited at first glance, given that only one of his sponsored bills (the *Providing Appropriate Recognition and Treatment Needed to Enhance*

---

[2] We label as "Moderate" those on the moderate side of their party's median, based on DW-NOMINATE Scores, and as "Liberal" those Democrats on the liberal side of their party median.

Relations with ASEAN Act) passed the House, and none of his sponsored bills became law as stand-alone measures. A deeper consideration of his legislative agenda, however, illustrates the ways in which Rep. Castro, similar to Rep. Bacon, was able to work behind the scenes to move his proposals through the lawmaking process, such that a substantial portion of the language in ten of his sponsored bills were ultimately incorporated into other vehicles that became law. Examples of these bills include the *Internet at Hardship Posts Act*, the *U.S.-ASEAN Center Act*, the *Intelligence Community Joint Duty Improvements Act*, and the *Southeast Asia Partnership Expansion Act*, all of which were incorporated (in large part) into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*. Taken together, Rep. Castro's Legislative Effectiveness Score places him as the fifth overall in the House, despite being a member of the minority party. His approach of working behind the scenes – to strike compromises and insert his bill language in other legislative vehicles – shows further opportunities for minority-party lawmakers to succeed in Congress.

Moving beyond Rep. Castro, we see that Representative Neguse and Delegate Norton continued their trends of being among the "top 10" most effective Democratic lawmakers, even though the Democrats were now the minority party in the 118th Congress. This speaks to their abilities to navigate the legislative process whether in the majority *or* minority party. Another Representative who stands out among the top ten most effective Democratic lawmakers is Rep. Jill Tokuda of Hawaii, who was a freshman in the 118th Congress, where she introduced 30 bills, 3 of which passed the House, and 2 of which became law. In addition to setting herself apart from her Democratic freshman counterparts, a deeper consideration of Rep. Tokuda's legislative record demonstrates that she cultivated a highly specialized policy agenda during her freshman term: more than 70% of her sponsored bills engaged with policies that were directly or indirectly related to Hawaii. The fact that a freshman legislator who cultivated a tightly tailored agenda was among the most effective Democratic lawmakers in the 118th Congress (and the most effective lawmaker in her freshman cohort) is consistent with our research on the [lawmaking value of gaining expertise in Congress through specialization](). And the finding that half of the lawmakers on this top-10 list were women is consistent with our research on the [heightened effectiveness of minority-party women]() in Congress.

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 118th Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 118th Senate. The list is again populated by those with chair positions, including committee chairs holding four of the top six spots. We once more find consistent patterns of legislative success across congresses: eight of the top 10 Democrats in the 118th Congress were among the top 10 most effective Democratic lawmakers in the Senate in the 117th Congress.

Top Ten List—Senate Democrats (118ᵗʰ Congress)

	Name	LES	Chair Position
1.	**Gary Peters (MI)**	10.648	Committee Chair
2.	**Alex Padilla (CA)**	2.875	Subcommittee Chair
3.	**Amy Klobuchar (MN)**	2.189	Committee Chair
4.	**Jon Tester (MT)**	1.963	Committee Chair
5.	**Jeff Merkley (OR)**	1.915	Subcommittee Chair
6.	**Thomas Carper (DE)**	1.719	Committee Chair
7.	**Catherine Cortez Masto (NV)**	1.676	Subcommittee Chair
8.	**Richard Durbin (IL)**	1.648	Committee Chair
9.	**Jacky Rosen (NV)**	1.565	Subcommittee Chair
10.	**Robert Menendez (NJ)**	1.443	Committee Chair

At the top of the list—for the third congress in a row—is Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan, who (as we noted previously) had the rare distinction of being the overall most effective lawmaker in the Senate in the 116ᵗʰ Congress, despite Democrats being the minority party in that Congress. As we noted in our analysis four years ago, Sen. Peters's feat cannot be found anywhere else in the Center for Effective Lawmaking data. In the 118ᵗʰ Congress, Sen. Peters continued to serve as the chair of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee; he introduced 152 bills, 34 of which passed the Senate, and 15 of which ultimately became law.

Consistent with his past practice in previous Congresses, with the exception of commemorative measures to name post offices in Michigan (which were both co-sponsored with his fellow Michigan Democratic Senator, Debbie Stabenow, as is customary), every bill that he sponsored that became law had at least one Republican cosponsor who was also advocating for its passage. For several of his sponsored bills, we likewise see that the only cosponsors of the legislation were Republican senators. As such, Sen. Peters's practice of coalition building and cosponsorship continues to comport with Center for Effective Lawmaking research showing that bipartisan lawmakers are much more effective than partisan lawmakers, even when in the majority party.

In addition to these legislative successes, Sen. Peters saw substantial portions of the language of another ten of his sponsored bills being incorporated into other legislators' bills that ultimately became law, including the *Defense Support for Cyber Emergencies Response Act of 2023,* the *Digital Defense Content Provenance Act of 2023,* and two other bills that were incorporated in large part into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*.

Sen. Alex Padilla of California was the second-most effective Democratic lawmaker in the Senate in the 118ᵗʰ Congress, where he was the chair of the subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water of the Budget, Environment and Public Works Committee, as well as serving as the chair of the Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee. During the 118ᵗʰ Congress, he sponsored 92 bills, 9 of which passed the Senate, and two of which became law. Moreover, we see that three of his sponsored bills were incorporated in large part into other legislative vehicles that ultimately became law, including the *Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act*, which was incorporated into the *Thomas R. Carper Water Resources*

Development Act of 2024, and the *Fusion Energy Act of 2024*, which was incorporated into appropriations legislation. The fact that both of these sponsored bills were referred to committees where he sat presumably provided him with opportunities to ensure that these measures were incorporated into other bills that were likely to advance further in the legislative process.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and Sen. Jon Tester of Montana continued to be ranked among the top five most effective Democratic lawmakers in the Senate, where Sen. Klobuchar was the Chair of the Rules and Administration Committee, and Sen. Tester was the Chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. From these positions, Sen. Klobuchar introduced 116 bills across a variety of policy areas, six of which passed the Senate, and three of which became law, while Sen. Tester introduced 62 bills, seven of which passed the Senate, and four of which became law. Consistent with his legislative record from the previous Congress, Sen. Tester cultivated a relatively focused legislative agenda in the 118th Congress, where more than half of his sponsored bills engaged with matters pertaining to Veterans' Affairs and/or Armed Services, and all of Sen. Tester's sponsored bills that became law were related to Veterans' Affairs, reflecting the ways in which he was able to leverage his position as committee chair to see his sponsored bills in these areas advance further in the lawmaking process.

Two other committee chairs on the top-10 list were Senators Thomas Carper (Environment and Public Works), and Dick Durbin (Judiciary), who were each successful both at stand-alone lawmaking and at having language inserted from their bills into other measures that ultimately became law. Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey was the remaining committee chair (Foreign Affairs) in the top 10. Although he failed to secure passage of any of his sponsored bills as stand-alone measures, he succeeded at inserting language from two of his sponsored bills into vehicles that became law. Sen. Jeff Merkley chaired the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, as well as chairing the Chemical Safety, Waste Management, Environmental Justice, and Regulatory Oversight Subcommittee of the Environment and Public Works Committee. He successfully advanced two sponsored bills into law: the *Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act*, and the *Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act*. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto and Sen. Jacky Rosen continued to be ranked among the top-10 most effective Democratic lawmakers in the Senate, as they were in the preceding 117th Congress. Sen. Cortez-Masto was successful at advancing one of her sponsored bills into law, while Sen. Rosen was successful at advancing two of her bills into law, and she likewise saw a substantial amount of language in one of her sponsored bills, the *MARITIME Act of 2023*, incorporated into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 118th Senate

Turning to the Republican Senators in the 118th Congress, our top-ten list features interesting findings, both in terms of broad patterns as well as in specific cases. First, consistent with our analysis of the 117th Congress, it is notable that there is significant overlap between the highest performers on the top-10 list for the 118th Congress and the preceding top-10 list for Republican lawmakers in the 117th Congress. More specifically, Senators Cornyn and Rubio continued to be the first and second-most effective lawmakers in the Republican Party in the 118th Congress, and Senator Braun and Senator Rounds continued to rank among the top-10 most effective lawmakers in the Senate.

Second, it is worth noting that there is notable overlap between the Legislative Effectiveness Scores of the top Republican and Democratic lawmakers in the Senate, such that several of the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers have higher Legislative Effectiveness Scores than the top-10 Democratic lawmakers, despite being in the minority party. For example, Sen. John Cornyn of Texas has a Legislative Effectiveness Score of 6.562, which actually makes him the second-most effective lawmaker in the Senate overall (behind Sen. Gary Peters). Similarly, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida's Legislative Effectiveness Score makes him the second-most effective Republican lawmaker in the Senate, and the fourth-most effective lawmaker in the Senate overall (with a score just slightly below that of Sen. Alex Padilla). As we noted in our previous analysis of the 117th Congress, the overlap between the Legislative Effectiveness Scores of the top performers in the Senate points to the ways in which the Senate continues to be a relatively bipartisan lawmaking institution, where members of both parties can successfully advance their legislative initiatives.

Third, it is interesting to note that the majority of the most effective Republican lawmakers—seven of 10—are ideologically located in the more conservative half of the Republican Party. This pattern reflects a deviation from past patterns, where in the 117th Congress (for example) we saw that only three out the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the Senate were drawn from the conservative wing of the party. On a related note, all of the four Republican senators who appeared among the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the 117th and 116th Senate, but did not appear in the top-10 list for the 118th Congress (Senators Grassley, Murkowski, Wicker, and Moran) had been identified as being members of the more moderate wing of the Republican Party. The fact that so many ideologically conservative members of the Republican Party—currently in the minority—were such successful lawmakers in the 118th Congress suggests that those legislators who are willing to work to find common ground with ideologically dissimilar members of the chamber (including, of course, members of the other party) can expect to see their sponsored bills advance further in the legislative process.

Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (118th Congress)

	Name	LES	Seniority	Ideology
1.	**John Cornyn (TX)**	6.562	11 Congresses	Moderate
2.	**Marco Rubio (FL)**	2.638	7 Congresses	Conservative
3.	**Ted Cruz (TX)**	2.258	6 Congresses	Conservative
4.	**Mike Braun (IN)**	1.767	3 Congresses	Conservative
5.	**Mike Rounds (SD)**	1.530	5 Congresses	Moderate
6.	**Deb Fischer (NE)**	1.495	6 Congresses	Moderate
7.	**James Lankford (OK)**	1.358	5 Congresses	Conservative
8.	**Joni Ernst (IA)**	1.343	5 Congresses	Conservative
9.	**Rick Scott (FL)**	1.291	3 Congresses	Conservative
10.	**Josh Hawley (MO)**	1.244	3 Congresses	Conservative

Turning more fully to the individual senators, Sen. John Cornyn tops the list for the second congress in a row, which follows from him introducing 107 bills, 21 of which passed the Senate, and seven of which became law. In addition to seeing seven of his sponsored bills advance into law as stand-alone measures, he succeeded in having large portions of the language in twelve of his other bills incorporated into different legislative vehicles that ultimately became law. Examples of such legislation include the *Air Security Act of 2023*, the *Securing American ARMS Act of 2023*, and the *CCP Act*, all of which were incorporated in substantial ways into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*. More broadly considered, we see that nearly all of the bills that he successfully appended to other legislative vehicles dealt with matters of armed forces and national security policy. This pattern stands in contrast to the policy content of his sponsored bills that ultimately became stand-alone laws, as only one of those seven bills dealt with national defense policy. Instead, most of the bills that he sponsored that advanced forward as stand-alone laws, such as the *Improving Access to Our Courts Act*, and the *Victims' VOICES Act*, dealt with judicial and legal matters.

Second on our top-10 list is Sen. Marco Rubio, who introduced 251 bills, 14 of which received some sort of action in committee, 4 of which passed the Senate, and 2 of which became law (with one additional bill passing both chambers before being vetoed by President Biden). Sen. Rubio's legislative engagement is consistent with a pattern that we documented in our previous analyses of the 116th and 117th Congresses, whereby the Senator developed an increasingly broad legislative agenda over his years in the Senate. In his freshman term in the Senate (the 112th Congress), Sen. Rubio sponsored only 17 bills. But the scope of his legislative agenda has consistently risen over time (as has the scope of his lawmaking successes), so that he has consistently been ranked as among the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the Senate since the 115th Congress.

Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana is ranked number four among Republican lawmakers (and the ninth-most effective lawmaker in the Senate overall) in the 118th Congress. Continuing his trend of lawmaking success since his first term in Congress, Sen. Braun introduced 116 bills, seven of which passed the Senate, and four of which became law. While he advanced legislation in several policy areas, the four bills that were ultimately signed into law engaged with policies pertaining to

Veterans' Affairs and/or Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, including the *GAO Inspector General Parity Act*, and the *Mark Our Place Act*. He was also successful at having a substantial portion of the language from one of his sponsored bills, the *Continue VET TEC Authorization Act of 2023*, inserted into the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*, which became law on January 2, 2025, just as the 118th Congress was concluding its business.

Sen. Mike Rounds is ranked number five among Republican lawmakers in the 118th Congress, where he introduced 50 bills, three of which passed the Senate, and two of which became law. While both bills were commemorative measures, which provided for the naming of post offices, Sen. Rounds was very successful at seeing the language from several of his sponsored bills inserted into other legislative vehicles that became law. For example, he succeeded in inserting language from the *Combat Power Preservation Act of 2023* and the *Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Unmet Needs Act of 2023* into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*; and he also succeeded in appending language from three of his other sponsored bills into an appropriations bill and into the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*.

Rising onto our top-10 list with the third-highest Legislative Effectiveness Score in the Republican Party is Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas. During the 118th Congress, Sen. Cruz introduced 132 bills, seven of which passed the Senate, and three of which became law, including the *Fog Forecast Improvement Act*, and the *Protect LNG Act of 2024*. Sen. Cruz also saw substantial portions of language from three of his other bills incorporated into an omnibus appropriations bill that became law. The fact that Sen. Cruz emerged as the third-most effective lawmaker in the Republican Party in the same congress that he was running for reelection is consistent with a broader pattern that has been established wherein senators who are up for reelection are more effective lawmakers in comparison to those congresses when they are not in cycle. The fact that Senators Fischer, Scott, and Hawley were also among the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the Senate in the 118th Congress (when they were all up for re-election) is likewise consistent with this broader empirical finding.

Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa and Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma are the other two new additions to our top-10 list. Sen. Ernst sponsored 69 bills, and while none of them were signed into law as stand-alone measures, she was successful at having substantial portions of language from four of her sponsored bills, including the *AI ACCORD Act of 2024* and the *CONVENE Act of 2023*, incorporated into other legislative vehicles that became law. Sen. Lankford sponsored 56 bills, five of which passed the Senate, and two of which became law; and he likewise succeeded in having language from his *Military Spouse Employment Act* incorporated into the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*.

Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of Exceeding Expectations

Some members of Congress attain the status of being a top-10 lawmaker within their party quite infrequently, rising onto the list due to their position as a committee chair or as a senator seeking legislative accomplishments prior to a tough election battle. For others, effective lawmaking is a way of life. As noted above, those who significantly exceed their benchmark score (which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member or chairperson) are identified as being in our "Exceeds Expectations" category.

Only about one quarter of lawmakers achieve the "exceeds expectations" rating in any given Congress. Those who are continuously members of this category are truly remarkable and worth watching. The lists below show those Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations continuing through (and including) the 118th Congress. We see that both Republican and Democratic members of Congress are quite prolific lawmakers, despite differences in their ideological positions and their views about the appropriate scope of government activism.

Representatives with Longest Streak of "Exceeding Expectations" (through the 118th Congress)

	Name	Streak	LES (in 118th)	Seniority
1.	Del. Eleanor Norton (D-DC)	17 Congresses	1.510	17 Congresses
2.	Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	7 Congresses	1.231	15 Congresses
3.	Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)	7 Congresses	2.736	22 Congresses
4.	Rep. Gerald Connolly (D-VA)	6 Congresses	1.073	8 Congresses
5.	Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO)	6 Congresses	3.022	6 Congresses
6.	Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL)	5 Congresses	2.458	9 Congresses
7.	Rep. Buddy Carter (R-GA)	5 Congresses	3.634	5 Congresses
8.	Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY)	4 Congresses	2.310	6 Congresses
9.	Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA)	4 Congresses	0.984	6 Congresses
10.	Rep. French Hill (R-AR)	4 Congresses	3.866	5 Congresses
11.	Rep. Scott Peters (D-CA)	4 Congresses	0.829	6 Congresses

Continuing her streak of being in the "Exceeds Expectations" category for each and every term of her decades-long congressional career is Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia. That Congresswoman Norton has kept this streak going for more than 30 years, while both in the majority or minority party, as well as serving as a rank-and-file lawmaker and as a chair at the committee or subcommittee level is truly remarkable. Delegate Norton's career offers lessons to those legislators who seek to become more effective lawmakers, and she is featured prominently in the CEL's guide to effective lawmaking for newly-elected members of Congress.

Second on the House list is Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, who passed away during her 15th term while serving in the 118th Congress, but who had maintained her high level of legislative engagement through her final term in Congress.

Representatives Carter and Wagner both continued their trend in effective lawmaking from previous congresses, such that they have both been in the "Exceeds Expectations" category for their entire congressional careers. Representatives Barr, Bilirakis, Brownley, Connolly, Hill, Peters, and Smith have likewise all extended their streaks of effective lawmaking to at least four congresses with the conclusion of the 118th Congress.

Senators with Longest Streak of "Exceeding Expectations" (through the 118th Congress)

	Name	Streak	LES (in 118th)	Seniority
1.	**Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)**	5 Congresses	6.562	11 Congresses
2.	**Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL)**	5 Congresses	2.638	7 Congresses
3.	**Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI)**	4 Congresses	10.648	5 Congresses

Turning to the Senate, the number of Senators with a four-or-more-Congress streak of "Exceeding Expectations" in lawmaking is one-half the number of Senators who had this categorization in the 117th Congress. With the announced retirement of Senator Peters, and with Senator Rubio leaving the Senate to become Secretary of State, it is clear that the United States Senate has lost a notable degree of lawmaking capacity, in comparison to more recent congresses, such that it is less obvious as to who will serve as the most prominent legislative leaders in future years. Such departures being coupled with others from the top-10 lists – Sen. Tester losing reelection and Sen. Braun elected as governor of Indiana – signals a diminished lawmaking capacity in the Senate in the years ahead.

High-Performing Freshmen

One way to glean which Representatives and Senators may rise to replace lost lawmaking capacity is to consider the freshman members who scored in our "Exceeds Expectations" in their first terms in office. Relative to the ten legislators who exceeded expectations during their freshman term in the 117th Congress, the current list of 12 is slightly larger, but it is still notably smaller than the list of 26 legislators who "Exceeded Expectations" in their lawmaking effectiveness during their freshman terms in the 116th Congress. The list is notably bipartisan, featuring members of the majority and minority party in nearly equal proportions. In contrast, in the previous congress, nine out of ten of the freshman members who exceeded expectations were in the minority (then Republican) party.

Freshmen Representatives "Exceeding Expectations" (118th Congress)

	Name	LES
1.	**Rep. Michael Lawler (R-NY)**	4.152
2.	**Rep. Marcus Molinaro (R-NY)**	3.951
3.	**Rep. Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ)**	3.588
4.	**Rep. Nick LaLota (R-NY)**	3.130
5.	**Rep. Jennifer Kiggans (R-VA)**	2.302
6.	**Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR)**	1.914
7.	**Rep. Chuck Edwards (R-NC)**	1.805
8.	**Rep. Jill Tokuda (D-HI)**	1.514
9.	**Rep. Val Hoyle (D-OR)**	1.195
10.	**Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA)**	0.863
11.	**Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA)**	0.844
12.	**Rep. Gabe Vasquez (D-NM)**	0.817

Every member on this list had at least one of their sponsored bills become law, or at least had the language from one of their sponsored bills substantially incorporated into another measure that ultimately became law. Given that ten of these 12 Representatives were reelected to the 119th Congress, and that research suggests that performance in a legislator's freshman term is highly correlated with subsequent lawmaking effectiveness, as well as with their overall career trajectory, we might expect to see these Representatives continuing to be effective lawmakers and setting the agendas of the Democratic and Republican parties in the future.

Freshmen Senators "Exceeding Expectations" (118th Congress)

	Name	LES (in 118th)	Seniority
1.	**Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA)**	2.875	2 Congresses
2.	**Sen. Mike Braun (R-IN)**	1.767	3 Congresses
3.	**Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV)**	1.565	3 Congresses
4.	**Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL)**	1.291	3 Congresses

Turning to the Senate, we define "Freshmen" in a slightly different way. Here we refer to any of the 28 senators in their first six-year term during the 118th Congress. The average Legislative Effectiveness Score of these 28 senators was 0.71, with majority-party "freshmen" scoring 0.87, and minority-party "freshmen" having an average score of 0.58. Four of these 28 senators had Legislative Effectiveness Scores that "Exceeded Expectations," with the top score being held by Sen. Alex Padilla, who was also the second-most effective Democratic lawmaker in the Senate overall. The remaining three senators (Braun, Rosen, and Scott) were likewise among the ten most effective lawmakers in the Democratic and Republican parties in the 118th Congress. With Sen. Braun concluding his service in the Senate to become Governor of Indiana in January 2025, it is

clear that there will be one less effective lawmaker among the more senior ranks in the Senate moving forward.

Most Successful Lawmakers at Having their Bill Language Attached to Others' Laws

We give bill sponsors credit if a large portion of their bill language was ultimately incorporated into another bill that became law. Hence, we are able to identify those members of the House and Senate who were most successful at having their sponsored standalone bills substantially incorporated into the laws of other members of Congress, frequently as policy riders or "hitchhikers." The most common vehicle for such hitchhikers in the 118th Congress was the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*, but there were many other omnibus packages as well. The most successful lawmakers who engage with this strategy—several of whom have been discussed in other contexts above—can be found in the lists below.

Most Successful "add ons" List—House (118th Congress)

	Name	**Additions**	**LES**	**Chair**	**Ideology**
1.	**Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE)**	12	6.001	None	Moderate
2.	**Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX)**	10	4.700	None	Liberal
3.	**Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)**	4	5.414	Committee	Moderate
4.	**Rep. French Hill (R-AR)**	4	3.866	Subcommittee	Moderate
5.	**Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI)**	3	2.815	Committee	Moderate
6.	**Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO)**	3	6.793	Committee	Moderate
7.	**Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO)**	3	4.162	None	Liberal

In looking across the lists of top performers, several points emerge, which are consistent with the patterns that we identified in our analysis of the previous, 117th, Congress. First, we see that the lists include members of the Republican and Democratic parties, such that Representatives and Senators from both parties are successful at having the language from their bills inserted into other vehicles that are ultimately passed and become law. Second, among majority-party members, all of the Representatives and Senators who are especially successful at having their language added to other bills—the lone exception being Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska—are chairs of committees or subcommittees, which points to the well-known importance and influence of these roles in setting the legislative agenda in the House and the Senate. Third, it is notable that the majority of these Representatives (5/7) and Senators (4/7) on these lists are relatively ideologically moderate, in comparison to other members of their parties, which points to how Representatives and Senators who are (relatively) centrist might find a pathway forward towards advancing their legislative agendas, even if they are not successful at seeing their sponsored bills advance in their stand-alone form.

Most Successful "add ons" List—Senate (118th Congress)

	Name	Additions	LES	Chair	Ideology
1.	Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)	12	6.562	None	Moderate
2.	Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI)	10	10.648	Committee	Moderate
3.	Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD)	5	1.530	None	Moderate
4.	Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA)	4	1.343	None	Conservative
5.	Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX)	3	2.258	None	Conservative
6.	Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA)	3	2.875	Subcommittee	Liberal
7.	Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)	3	1.149	Subcommittee	Moderate

Finally, as was the case in the 117th Congress, we see that those Representatives and Senators who are most successful at having their language inserted into other bills in the 118th Congress tend to be those same lawmakers who were most successful at advancing stand-alone measures in the previous (117th) Congress. In other words, the most effective lawmakers at successfully advancing their own agenda items as stand-alone bills are also effective at working behind the scenes to have their legislative language inserted into other legislative vehicles that are moving into law.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Although the 118th Congress started off slowly in terms of lawmaking, and it was disrupted by unprecedented Speaker battles in the House, in the end hundreds of bills found their way into law, with hundreds more embedded within larger legislative packages. While most of these were not as noteworthy as the high-profile laws trumpeted in the 117th Congress, they dealt with a broad array of policy issues, ranging from defense and international affairs to the environment, transportation, and government operations.

This report highlights the lawmakers who did the hard work necessary to advance these policy changes on behalf of their constituents and the American people more broadly. Despite the challenges of divided government, internal disruptions, and a contentious presidential election year, many of the same lawmakers who succeeded in advancing their proposals in previous Congresses continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking.

While we see a loss of lawmaking capacity as those on our lists of high performers leave Congress, there are also bright spots of newly elected members bringing new ideas and high levels of legislative skill toward the advancement of policy solutions. It is these lawmakers who we will be watching most intently, as they seek consensus and build solutions to address the many public policy challenges that lie ahead.