Highlights from the New 118th Congress Interest & Legislative Effectiveness Scores

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

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the Interest & Legislative Effectiveness Scores (ILES) in each of 21 different issue areas for the 118th Congress (2023-25). These categories are based on issue area codes from the Comparative Agendas Project with bill issue codings drawn from www.congress.gov. The methodology that we employed to construct these issue-based scores is the same as that for the overall LES. Specifically, we combine fifteen metrics capturing how many bills each member of Congress sponsors within the specific issue area, 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. The distinguishing characteristic between the overall LES and the issue-specific ILES is that for the latter, we base our analysis on the subset of bills that each legislator sponsored in each issue area.

Below we identify the top performing lawmakers in each area, by party, for both the House and the Senate in the 118th Congress. Readers interested in exploring these scores more thoroughly can find all of these scores on the CEL website.

Most Effective Lawmakers in the 118th House, by Policy Area and Party

Policy Area	Top Republican	ILES	Top Democrat	ILES
Agriculture	Andy Harris (MD)	84.3	William Keating (MA)	27.3
Civil Rights	Michael Lawler (NY)	191.9	James Clyburn (SC)	57.8
Commerce	*Patrick McHenry (NC)*	25.7	Frank Pallone (NJ)	24.9
Defense	Don Bacon (NE)	36.1	Mark Takano (CA)	10.6
Education	Erin Houchin (IN)	61.9	Lucy McBath (GA)	30.9
Energy	*Cathy Rodgers (WA)*	33.9	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY)	5.3
Environment	*Sam Graves (MO)*	33.6	Joe Neguse (CO)	24.6
Government Ops.	*James Comer (KY)*	19.5	Dina Titus (NV)	7.8
Health	Brett Guthrie (KY)	23.6	William Pascrell (NJ)	18.8
Housing	Monica De La Cruz (TX)	158.2	Derek Kilmer (WA)	46.2
Immigration	Tom McClintock (CA)	41.6	Ed Case* (HI)	22.8
Int'l Affairs	J. French Hill (AR)	27.6	Joaquin Castro (TX)	36.3
Labor	Darin LaHood (IL)	108.1	Susan Wild (PA)	9.5
Law, Crime, Family	Scott Fitzgerald (WI)	20.8	Sheila Jackson Lee (TX)	10.6
Macroeconomics	*Tom Cole (OK)*	47.0	Brendan Boyle (PA)	5.6
Native Americans	Dusty Johnson (SD)	52.6	Sharice Davids (KS)	29.4
Public Lands	John Curtis (UT)	28.8	Joe Neguse (CO)	23.0
Technology	*Mike Gallagher (WI)*	34.2	Haley Stevens (MI)	14.8
Trade	Michael Waltz (FL)	79.6	Gregory Meeks (NY)	7.8
Transportation	*Sam Graves (MO)*	91.5	Greg Stanton (AZ)	12.7

Welfare	Garret Graves (LA)	111.3	Danny Davis (IL)	3.5

Note: Committee Chairs in italics
*Tied with Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove (CA)

Consistent with our analysis of the preceding (117th) congress, we see that several of the top House performers in particular issue areas are committee chairs, for which their committee jurisdictions tightly overlap with the issue areas that we identify above. For example, Rep. James Comer chaired the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and was the top Republican performer in *Government Operations*; Rep. Sam Graves chaired the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and was the top Republican performer in *Transportation*. Rep. Sam Graves was also the most effective Republican lawmaker on policies related to the *Environment*.

On the Democratic side, Rep. Joe Neguse (CO) emerged as the most effective Democratic lawmaker on *Environment* and *Public Lands* policies, where for the latter policy area he was also the most effective Democratic lawmaker in the 117th Congress.

As we have noted in the past, in analyzing issue area success, we see that very high scores arise either from a truly remarkable performance in lawmaking by an individual in his or her chosen area, or because that area featured very little lawmaking activity across all members. Because each score is normalized to an average value of one, the total score of 448 in each issue area is spread across all of 448 members who proposed bills in the 118th House.

Most Effective Lawmakers in the 118th Senate, by Policy Area and Party

Policy Area	Top Democrat	ILES	Top Republican	ILES
Agriculture	Raphael Warnock (GA)	24.1	Markwayne Mullin (OK)	8.7
Civil Rights	Kirsten Gillibrand (NY)	72.5	Marco Rubio (FL)	2.2
Commerce	*Christopher Coons (DE)*	13.9	Joni Ernst (IA)	9.4
Defense	*Jon Tester (MT)*	12.9	John Cornyn (TX)	13.7
Education	*Gary Peters (MI)*	14.7	Bill Cassidy (LA)	18.4
Energy	*Gary Peters (MI)*	21.0	Steve Daines (MT)	9.7
Environment	*Thomas Carper (DE)*	20.1	Deb Fischer (NE)	4.7
Government Ops.	*Gary Peters (MI)*	31.6	James Lankford (OK)	5.3
Health	*Richard Durbin (IL)*	9.4	Susan Collins (ME)	19.0
Housing	*John Reed (RI)*	5.2	Mike Braun (IN)	28.1
Immigration	*Gary Peters (MI)*	47.2	Roger Marshall (KS)	8.4
Int'l Affairs	*Robert Menendez (NJ)*	12.7	Marco Rubio (FL)	15.9
Labor	*Bernard Sanders (VT)**	15.9	Josh Hawley (MO)	23.1
Law, Crime, Family	*Richard Durbin (IL)*	5.0	John Cornyn (TX)	25.2
Macroeconomics	*Gary Peters (MI)*	33.8	John Cornyn (TX)	13.5
Native Americans	Alex Padilla (CA)	14.1	Lisa Murkowski (AK)	10.0
Public Lands	Martin Heinrich (NM)	8.5	Steve Daines (MT)	7.4
Technology	*Maria Cantwell (WA)*	11.5	Eric Schmitt (MO)	14.1

Trade	*Gary Peters (MI)*	13.8	John Cornyn (TX)	44.4
Transportation	*Gary Peters (MI)*	26.9	John Cornyn (TX)	7.4
Welfare	*Bernard Sanders (VT)**	47.5	John Kennedy (LA)	21.6

Note: Committee Chairs in italics
*Senator Bernie Sanders (VT) is an Independent who caucuses with the Democratic Party

Similar to the House, we see that committee chairs are prominently featured as top issue area performers in the Senate; and, again, we see that Senators' successes in particular issue areas are frequently tied to their committees' specified jurisdictions. For example, consistent with his pattern of lawmaking effectiveness in the 117th Congress, Sen. Gary Peters, Chair of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, led the *Government Operations* and *Technology* policy areas (both of which had clear ties to his committee). More broadly considered, we see that Democratic top issue area performers were mostly dominated by committee chairs, the few exceptions being Sen. Raphael Warnock (GA), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Sen. Alex Padilla (CA), and Sen. Martin Heinrich (NM), who were the top Democratic performers in *Agriculture*, *Civil Rights*, *Native Americans*, and *Public Lands* policies, respectively. Moreover, we see that Sen. Gary Peters was the top issue performer in seven different issue areas. Given that Sen. Peters has announced his intention to retire following the conclusion of the 119th Congress, it goes without saying that his retirement will lead to a significant decrease in the lawmaking capacity of Democratic senators.

Among minority-party Republicans, Sen. Lisa Murkowski continued to be the top performer on *Native Americans* among Republicans, as she had been in the 117th Congress. Sen. John Cornyn was the most effective Republican lawmaker in five different policy areas, including *Defense*, *Law*, and *Trade*, where he was the most effective lawmaker in the Senate in each of these areas, despite being in the minority party. Sen. Marco Rubio emerged as the most effective Republican lawmaker on *Civil Rights* and *International Affairs*, where the latter issue area comports well with his current duties as Secretary of State. And Sen. Steve Daines (MT) likewise emerged as a top performer on the Republican side for two issue areas: *Energy* and *Public Lands*.

Consistent with our analysis of the 117th Congress, we also see that while it is the case that the top performing Democratic senators far exceeded the top performing Republicans on certain issues more commonly associated with Democratic Party priorities, such as *Civil Rights* and *Welfare*, the patterns emerging here once again show active and effective lawmaking across numerous areas by both Democrats and Republicans. Hence, the Senate continues to be an institution where members of both parties often engage in bipartisan lawmaking, even if such activities are behind the scenes and not otherwise widely reported.