



**Highlights from the 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas General Assembly Legislative Effectiveness Scores**

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**Executive Summary**

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas General Assembly legislative session (2023-2024). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective legislators in the majority party in both chambers, the top-5 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the most effective minority-party lawmaker in the Senate. Many legislators continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. This is not a new phenomenon in Arkansas. Across the 2023–2024 legislative term, majority-party Republicans consistently outperformed minority-party Democrats in State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and bill outcomes. These differences highlight the institutional advantages of majority-party association.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 94th Arkansas General Assembly legislative session, particularly in the House of Representatives, where many of the most effective lawmakers across the majority party held committee chair positions.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one legislative session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across sessions, as several legislators appear among the lists of most effective lawmakers in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

## Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills 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 of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator’s majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.46 compared to 1.12 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.72. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.32 in the minority party, 1.14 in the majority party, and 1.20 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as “Above Expectations” for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, “Below Expectations” for those below 50% of their benchmark, and “Meeting Expectations” for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Arkansas General Assembly together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

### Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Two of the top ten were committee chairs.

#### Top Ten List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Jimmy Gazaway (District 31)</b>	7.32	None
2.	<b>Lee Johnson (District 47)</b>	6.10	Chair
3.	<b>Deann Vaught (District 87)</b>	4.60	None
4.	<b>Robin Lundstrum (District 18)</b>	3.66	None
5.	<b>David Ray (District 69)</b>	3.64	None
6.	<b>Aaron Pilkington (District 45)</b>	3.63	None
7.	<b>John Maddox (District 86)</b>	3.01	Chair
8.	<b>Les Warren (District 84)</b>	2.58	None
9.	<b>Jeff Wardlaw (District 94)</b>	2.44	None

<b>10.</b>	<b>Howard Beaty (District 95)</b>	2.34	None
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At the top of the list is Representative Jimmy Gazaway from District 31 (Greene County) with a score of 7.32. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 47 bills, 40 received action beyond committee, 35 passed the House, and 34 became law.

Rep. Gazaway holds a B.A. in political science from Arkansas State University and a J.D. from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law. From 2008-2017, Rep. Gazaway was a deputy prosecuting attorney for the Second Judicial District of Arkansas. He now works as a private practice attorney in Paragould and has served as legal counsel for several municipalities in Arkansas. In the community, Rep. Gazaway is involved in the Paragould Chamber of Commerce, the Paragould Rotary Club, and the Paragould Young Professionals Group.

Five Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Jimmy Gazaway (District 31), Rep. Lee Johnson (District 47), Rep. Robin Lundstrum (District 18), Rep. Les Warren (District 84), and Rep. Jeff Wardlaw (District 94).

### **Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas House of Representatives**

The following table identifies the top five highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats.

#### **Top Five List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>LES</u></b>	<b><u>Seniority</u></b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Andrew Collins (District 73)</b>	2.17	3
<b>2.</b>	<b>Mark Perry (District 66)</b>	0.99	3
<b>3.</b>	<b>Ashley Hudson (District 75)</b>	0.69	2
<b>4.</b>	<b>Denise Ennett (District 80)</b>	0.68	3
<b>5.</b>	<b>Jamie Scott (District 72)</b>	0.56	3

Topping our list is Representative Andrew Collins of District 73 (Pulaski County) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 2.17. He introduced 15 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session, 12 of which received action beyond committee and 9 of which passed the House of Representatives and became law.

Rep. Collins assumed office in 2019 and currently serves as the House Minority Leader. Rep. Collins attended Duke University and holds a J.D. from Columbia Law School. He currently works as a real estate attorney for Cypress Properties. In addition to his service in the House, Rep. Collins is a commissioner of the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission, an advocacy group that focuses

on providing all of Arkansas equal access to the legal system and expanding civil legal aid opportunities.

Three Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-5 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Andrew Collins (District 73), Rep. Mark Perry (District 66), and Rep. Jamie Scott (District 72).

### Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Three of the top ten were committee chairs.

#### Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Missy Irvin (District 24)</b>	4.28	Chair
2.	<b>Kim Hammer (District 16)</b>	2.84	None
3.	<b>Jonathan Dismang (District 18)</b>	2.61	None
4.	<b>Jane English (District 13)</b>	1.64	Chair
5.	<b>Jim Dotson (District 34)</b>	1.61	None
6.	<b>John Payton (District 22)</b>	1.36	None
7.	<b>Joshua Bryant (District 32)</b>	1.33	None
8.	<b>Dave Wallace (District 19)</b>	1.23	None
9.	<b>Mark Johnson (District 17)</b>	1.15	Chair
10.	<b>Alan Clark (District 7)</b>	1.13	None

Among Republicans in the Senate, Senator Missy Irvin of District 24 (Searcy, Stone, and Van Buren counties) ranked first with a SLES score of 4.28. In the 2023-2024 session, she introduced 55 bills; 52 of which received action beyond committee and 40 of which passed the Senate and became law.

Sen. Irvin was elected to the Senate in 2010 and at the time was the youngest woman ever elected to the Arkansas Senate. She holds a B.A. with a triple major in Political Science, Communications, and Dance from Randolph-Macon Women’s College. In her professional life, she worked as a news editor for KATV-Channel 7, as an adjunct Professor of Dance at Hendrix College, and in marketing across various companies. She is currently the marketing director of Irvin-Dibrell Clinic in Mountain View. In 2019, she was appointed to the Arkansas Supreme Court Commission on Children, Youth, and Families. In the community, she is a founding board member of the Human Rights for Kids Organization and the Mountain View Youth Soccer Association.

Seven legislators on the list were among the top10 highest-scoring Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Missy Irvin (District 24), Sen. Kim Hammer (District 16), Sen. Jonathan

Dismang (District 18), Sen. Jane English (District 13), Sen. Dave Wallace (District 19), Sen. Mark Johnson (District 17), and Sen. Alan Clark (District 7).

**Most Effective Democratic Lawmaker in Senate (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Tucker Clarke (District 14)</b>	1.04	2

Senator Tucker Clarke (Pulaski County) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 2023-2024 legislative session with a score of 1.04. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 23 bills, 12 of which received action beyond committee, 9 passed the Senate, and 8 became law.

Sen. Clarke assumed office in the Senate in 2021. Before joining the Senate, he served in the Arkansas House, representing District 35. Sen. Clarke holds a B.A. in government from Harvard University and a J.D. from the University of Arkansas School of Law. At the beginning of his career, Sen. Clarke served for two years as a clerk for Judge James Leon Holmes in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas. He then entered private practice and became an adjunct professor at the William H. Bowen School of Law. In the community, he serves on the Vestry and as Chancellor of Trinity Episcopal; is a member of the Board of Directors for the Arkansas Imagination Library; and is a founding chair of the Tiger Foundation, which supports Little Rock Central High School.

Senator Clarke was also the most effective Democratic lawmaker in the Arkansas Senate during the 2021-2022 legislative session.

**Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”**

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority-party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Jimmy Gazaway (R-31)</b>	4 Legislative Sessions	7.32	4 Legislative Sessions

2.	<b>Robin Lundstrum (R-18)</b>	4 Legislative Sessions	3.66	5 Legislative Sessions
3.	<b>Lee Johnson (R-47)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	6.10	3 Legislative Sessions
4.	<b>Andrew Collins (D-73)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	2.17	3 Legislative Sessions
5.	<b>Mark Perry (D-66)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	0.99	3 Legislative Sessions

Representative Jimmy Gazaway (R) of District 31 (Greene County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 4 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 7.32 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. Rep. Gazaway (as noted above) was the most effective Republican lawmaker in the House in the 2023-2024 legislative session. In addition, he has consistently been ranked among the top-5 most effective Republican lawmakers in the House since 2019.

**State Senators with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Streak</b></u>	<u><b>SLES (2023-2024)</b></u>	<u><b>Seniority</b></u>
1.	<b>Missy Irvin (R-24)</b>	4 Legislative Sessions	4.28	7 Legislative Sessions
2.	<b>Kim Hammer (R-16)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	2.84	3 Legislative Sessions
3.	<b>Greg Leding (D-30)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	0.58	3 Legislative Sessions

Senator Missy Irvin (R) of District 24 (Searcy, Stone, and Van Buren counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 4 legislative sessions and an SLES score of 4.28 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. Sen. Irvin (as noted above) was the most effective Republican lawmaker in the Senate in the 2023-2024 legislative session. In addition, she has consistently been ranked among the top-10 most effective Senate Republicans since 2011.

**High-Performing Freshmen**

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives and Senators who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. Freshman legislators’ initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future leadership

roles: our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions and to influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

### **Freshmen Representative “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	<b>Grant Hodges (R-15)</b>	1.48

Grant Hodges (Benton County) was the one Representative who had an “Above Expectations” SLES score during his freshman term with a score of 1.48. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Rep. Hodges introduced 11 bills, 8 received action beyond committee, and 7 passed the House and became law. While Rep. Hodges was technically a “freshman” legislator in the 2023-2024 legislative session, he had previously served in the Arkansas House, between 2015-2020. His prior experience in the chamber likely gave him an advantage over other first-term lawmakers.

Rep. Hodges holds a bachelor’s and master’s degree in political science from the University of Arkansas. Between his service in the House, he served as the executive director of community and government relations at Northwest Arkansas Community College. He is currently employed at JCD Consulting.

### **Other Findings**

In terms of broader patterns, Republicans maintained strong control of the Arkansas General Assembly in 2023-24, with Democrats holding only 18 of the 100 seats in the House and 6 of the 35 in the Senate. Lacking natural coalition partners on many of their proposals, Democrats in Arkansas had a difficult time advancing their legislation, much more so than minority-party members across the country. Nationwide, minority-party lawmakers scored an average SLES of around 0.6, compared to 0.46 in the Arkansas House and 0.32 in the Arkansas Senate (the lowest performance in Arkansas among minority-party Senators in our data, which stretches back to 1997).

This does not mean that Democrats were completely shut out of the lawmaking process, however. Thirty-three bills proposed by Democrats in the House and 14 from Democratic Senators became law. But the sheer number of Republicans and the success of their proposals meant that 679 of the 726 laws produced in Arkansas in 2023-24 were sponsored by Republicans.

## **Conclusion**

The 94<sup>th</sup> Arkansas General Assembly legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Arkansas.