



**Highlights from 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska State Legislature State 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 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature (2023-2024). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective lawmakers in the 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature. Many listed 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 serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature, where seven of the top ten most effective lawmakers held committee chair positions.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across multiple sessions, as several legislators appear on the lists of most effective lawmakers in both the 108<sup>th</sup> and 107<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature.

**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 the 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

It is important to note that Nebraska hosts the nation’s only unicameral and non-partisan state legislature. Our lists account for this variable, and we do not include party affiliation during our analysis, unlike other states that we have explored in our state-level analysis. In addition, in 2024,

the Nebraska Legislature adopted a provision limiting each Senator to introducing 20 bills per session. The bill cap became active during the 109th Nebraska Legislature.

For each member of the Legislature, we identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators’ dependent on 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 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature, chairs had an average SLES of 1.50 while average non-committee chairs had a SLES of 0.81. While the scores capture how successful an individual member of the Nebraska Legislature is at advancing her sponsored bills, compared to all of members of her chamber (in a legislative term), it’s important to be cognizant of the fact that the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores do not capture lawmaking activities that occur behind the scenes, such as legislators advocating for the passage of bills that they haven’t sponsored. The scores also don’t capture how effective individual members of the Legislature are at blocking the advancement of other legislators’ sponsored bills. To the extent that we are interested in identifying who is most successful at advancing their sponsored legislation through the different stages of the lawmaking process (and why), however, the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores provide us with an objective indicator of legislators’ efforts.

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.

**Highly Effective Lawmakers in the 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature**

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Senators in the 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

**Top Ten Most Effective Senators (108<sup>th</sup> Legislature)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Lou Ann Linehan (District 39)</b>	2.82	Chair
<b>2.</b>	<b>Tom Brewer (District 43)</b>	2.65	Chair
<b>3.</b>	<b>Justin Wayne (District 13)</b>	2.44	Chair
<b>4.</b>	<b>Eliot Bostar (District 29)</b>	2.13	None
<b>5.</b>	<b>Mike McDonnell (District 5)</b>	2.01	Chair
<b>6.</b>	<b>Terrell McKinney (District 11)</b>	1.92	Chair
<b>7.</b>	<b>Wendy DeBoer (District 10)</b>	1.68	None
<b>8.</b>	<b>Lynne Walz (District 15)</b>	1.53	None
<b>9.</b>	<b>Dave Murman (District 38)</b>	1.44	Chair
<b>10.</b>	<b>Merv Riepe (District 12)</b>	1.33	Chair

At the top of the list is Senator Lou Ann Linehan from District 39 (Omaha) with a score of 2.82. In the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature, she introduced 75 bills, 28 of which received action beyond committee, and 16 passed the legislature and became law.

Sen. Linehan assumed office in 2017 and left office in 2025. While a member of the Legislature, Sen. Linehan served as chairwoman of the Revenue Committee. Sen. Linehan attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and sold insurance, health insurance, and annuities during her early career. Later in her career, she served as Chief of Staff to U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel and then transitioned to work for the U.S. State Department until she retired from federal service in 2012. She has been recognized with several honors for her leadership, including being named a Distinguished Honoree by the Women’s Center for Advancement and receiving the U.S. Department of State Superior Honor Award.

Three legislators on the list were among the top 10 highest-ranking Senators in the 107<sup>th</sup> Legislature: Sen. Tom Brewer (District 43), Sen. Justin Wayne (District 13), and Sen. Mike McDonnell (District 5).

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

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and/or status as a committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The list below identifies the Senator with the longest active streak of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

**Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Justin Wayne (District 13)	4 Legislative Sessions	2.44	4 Legislative Sessions

Senator Justin Wayne of District 13 (Omaha) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 4 legislative sessions and a SLES of 2.44 in the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature. During the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Sen. Wayne introduced 101 bills, 29 of which received action beyond committee; 8 passed the legislature; and 7 became law. Sen. Wayne has consistently ranked among the top-3 most effective lawmakers in the Nebraska Legislature since 2017.

Sen. Wayne assumed office in 2017 and left office in 2025. He holds a B.S. and J.D. from Creighton University. Sen. Wayne currently operates his own law firm practicing Commercial and Civil Litigation and previously worked as an assistant director in labor relations at Union Pacific Railroad. In the community, Sen. Wayne is the President of the Midwest Trailblazers Youth Program and serves on the board of directors for Goodwill Industries.

## High-Performing Freshmen

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen 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 Senators “Above Expectations” (108<sup>th</sup> Legislature)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	<b>Danielle Conrad (District 46)</b>	1.22
2.	<b>George Dungan (District 26)</b>	1.20

The Senator with the highest score who was also "Above Expectations" during her freshman term was Senator Danielle Conrad (Lincoln) with a score of 1.22. During the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Sen. Conrad introduced 51 bills, 16 of which received action beyond committee, and 6 of which passed the legislature and became law.

Though technically a “freshman” legislator in the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Sen. Conrad previously served in the Nebraska Legislature between 2007-2015. She won reelection in 2023. Her prior experience in the chamber likely gave her an advantage over other first-term lawmakers.

Sen. Conrad holds a B.A. and J.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. At the start of her career, she worked with the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law, focusing on public-interest law and legal counsel for disadvantaged communities. From 2014-2022, Sen. Conrad served as the chair of the ACLU of Nebraska and grew the organization’s size and impact. In the community, she is a former board member of Legal Aid of Nebraska and the Nebraska Lawyers Trust Account.

The Senator with the second-highest "Above Expectations" during his freshman term was Senator George Dungan of District 26 (Lincoln) with a score of 1.20. During the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Sen. Dungan introduced 45 bills, 15 of which received action beyond committee, and 6 passed the legislature and became law.

Sen. Dungan holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Kansas and a J.D. from American University. He is a former deputy public defender in Lancaster County and currently works as an

attorney. In the community, he is a former member of the Lincoln Pedestrian Bicycle Advisory Committee and a current member of the Robert Van Pelt Inns of Court Executive Board.

## **Conclusion**

The 108<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators continuing to hold an advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across the unicameral legislature, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, which points to the importance of maintaining institutional memory for ensuring a durable capacity for lawmaking. More broadly speaking, these findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Nebraska.