



Highlights from the 86th West Virginia Legislature State Legislative Effectiveness Scores

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

Paige Higginson-Rollins, Program Director for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Caroline Clements, Program Specialist for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

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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 86th West Virginia 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 majority party in both chambers, the top-5 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Delegates, 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 West Virginia. Across the 86th West Virginia Legislature, majority-party Republicans consistently outperformed minority-party Democrats in State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and bill outcomes. Of the 1,031 laws produced during the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, only 11 were sponsored by Democrats. This presents a 100:1 law ratio between Republicans and Democrats, highlighting the strong institutional advantages of majority-party affiliation in West Virginia.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 86th West Virginia Legislature legislative sessions, 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 Delegates and the State Senate in each legislative session. While the scores capture how successful an individual member of the West Virginia House of Delegates or Senate is at advancing her sponsored bills, compared to all 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 House of Delegates or Senate 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. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found on our website.

For each member of the House of Delegates 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 86th West Virginia House of Delegates, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.43 compared to 1.08 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 2.47. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.24 in the minority party, 1.10 in the majority party, and 1.60 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 West Virginia Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 86th West Virginia House of Delegates

The following table identifies the top ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 West Virginia House of Delegates. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

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

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Committee Chair</u> |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Roger Hanshaw (District 62) | 19.40 | Chair |
| 2. | Amy Summers (District 73) | 6.59 | Chair |
| 3. | Geoff Foster (District 20) | 6.04 | None |
| 4. | Doug Smith (District 39) | 4.86 | None |
| 5. | Daniel Linville (District 22) | 3.67 | Chair |
| 6. | Gary Howell (District 87) | 3.61 | Chair |
| 7. | Joe Ellington (District 38) | 3.06 | Chair |
| 8. | Vernon Criss (District 12) | 2.98 | Chair |
| 9. | Brandon Steele (District 42) | 2.42 | None |
| 10. | Steve Westfall (District 16) | 2.30 | Chair |

At the top of the list is Delegate Roger Hanshaw from District 62 (Calhoun, Clay, and Braxton counties) with a score of 19.40. In the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, he introduced 233 bills, 173 of which received action beyond committee, 102 passed the House of Delegates, and 92 became law.

Del. Hanshaw assumed office in 2014 and was elected as Speaker of the West Virginia House of Delegates in 2018. He holds a B.S. and J.D. from West Virginia University and a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Notre Dame. He is currently a practicing attorney and partner at Bowles and Rice, specializing in environmental and regulatory compliance. In addition, Del. Hanshaw is a certified professional parliamentarian and consults regularly with organizations and the government on parliamentary laws and procedures. In the community, Del. Hanshaw serves on the West Virginia Farm Bureau Board of Directors, is a member of the American Chemical Society, and is a member of the National Association of Parliamentarians.

For further information about Del. Hanshaw and his approach to lawmaking, see our interview with the Delegate as part of our “Conversations with Effective Lawmakers” series [here](#).

Seven Republican Delegates on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Del. Roger Hanshaw (District 62), Del. Geoff Foster (District 20), Del. Daniel Linville (District 22), Del. Gary Howell (District 87), Del. Joe Ellington (District 38), Del. Brandon Steele (District 42), and Del. Steve Westfall (District 16).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 86th West Virginia House of Delegates

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

Top Five List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1. | Kayla Young (District 56) | 1.96 | 2 |
| 2. | Larry Rowe (District 52) | 0.83 | 5 |
| 3. | Sean Hornbuckle (District 25) | 0.63 | 5 |
| 4. | Elliot Pritt (District 50) | 0.62 | 1 |
| 5. | Mike Pushkin (District 54) | 0.48 | 5 |

Topping our list is Delegate Kayla Young of District 56 (Kanawha County) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 1.96. She introduced 191 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, 7 of which received action beyond committee, and 3 passed the House of Delegates and became law.

Del. Young assumed office in 2020, and she is currently the Minority Leader Pro Tempore. She holds a B.A. in interdisciplinary studies and an M.S. in integrated marketing from West Virginia University. In addition, she has attended specialty education courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University. Before being elected to the legislature, Del. Young worked as an entrepreneur and chef-owner of Eggs Will Roll. In the community, she has been involved with Rotary International, the National Organization for Women, and Boss Babes WV.

Del. Young was also among the top 5 highest-scoring Democratic Delegates during the 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 86th West Virginia State Senate

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

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

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Committee Chair</u> |
|----|--|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Jack Woodrum (District 10) | 6.47 | Chair |
| 2. | Craig Blair (District 15) | 5.75 | Chair |
| 3. | Charles S. Trump IV (District 15) | 2.36 | Chair |
| 4. | Eric J. Tarr (District 4) | 1.82 | Chair |
| 5. | Ryan Weld (District 1) | 1.65 | Chair |

| | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------|------|-------|
| 6. | Patricia Rucker (District 16) | 1.52 | Chair |
| 7. | Amy Nichole Grady (District 4) | 1.49 | Chair |
| 8. | Eric Nelson (District 17) | 1.43 | Chair |
| 9. | Tom Takubo (District 17) | 1.41 | None |
| 10. | Jason Barrett (District 16) | 0.81 | None |

Among Republicans in the Senate, Senator Jack Woodrum of District 10 (Fayette, Summers, Monroe, Greenbrier, and Nicholas counties) ranked first with a SLES score of 6.47. In the 2023-2024 sessions, he introduced 367 bills, 203 of which received action beyond committee, 64 passed the Senate, and 41 became law.

Sen. Woodrum was first elected to the Senate in 2020. Before serving in the Senate, Sen. Woodrum was a member of the Summers County Commission, served on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Counties, and was a member of the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia. He holds a degree in Mortuary Science from Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science and currently works as a Funeral Director, Embalmer, and Restorative Artist. In the community, Sen. Woodrum has been affiliated with many organizations, including Lions International, the Summers County Republican Executive Committee, the Citizens Conservation Corps of WV, and the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority.

Seven legislators on the list were among the top 10 highest-scoring Republican Senators in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Sen. Craig Blair (District 15), Sen. Charles S. Trump IV (District 15), Sen. Eric J. Tarr (District 4), Sen. Ryan Weld (District 1), Sen. Patricia Rucker (District 16), Sen. Eric Nelson (District 17), and Sen. Tom Takubo (District 17).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmaker in the 86th West Virginia Senate

The following table identifies the highest scorer in the 2023-2024 West Virginia Senate among minority-party Democrats.

Most Effective Senate Democrat (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|-----------|--|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Michael “Mike” Woelfel (District 5) | 0.54 | 4 |

Senator Michael “Mike” Woelfel of District 5 (Cabell and Wayne counties) had the highest SLES among Senate Democrats in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, with a score of 0.54. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, he introduced 39 bills, 14 of which received action beyond committee, 12 passed the Senate, and 1 became law.

Sen. Woelfel was elected to the Senate in 2014. He previously served as Senate Minority Whip, and he was elected Senate Minority Leader in 2022. He holds a B.A. in history from Marshall

University and a J.D. from West Virginia University. He first worked as a Prosecuting Attorney for Cabell County, and then as a Cabell County Juvenile Court Referee for the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. Sen. Woelfel also worked as an adjunct Professor of Law at Marshall University. Now he owns Woelfel & Woelfel LLP and is a Trial Attorney.

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. We identify the Delegates and Senators with the longest active streak of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session below.

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

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>Streak</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Amy Summers (R-73) | 4 Legislative Sessions | 6.59 | 5 Legislative Sessions |
| 2. | Roger Hanshaw (R-62) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 19.40 | 5 Legislative Sessions |
| 3. | Geoff Foster (R-20) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 6.04 | 5 Legislative Sessions |
| 4. | Brandon Steele (R-42) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 2.42 | 3 Legislative Sessions |
| 5. | Paul Espinosa (R-98) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 1.12 | 6 Legislative Sessions |

Delegate Amy Summers (R) of District 73 (Marion and Taylor counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 4 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 6.59 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Del. Summers introduced 86 bills, 54 of which received action beyond committee, 46 passed the House of Delegates, and 25 became law. Del. Summers (as noted above) was the second highest-scoring House Republican Delegate in the 2023-2024 session.

Del. Summers assumed office in 2015 and served until 2023. While in the House, Del. Summers served as Majority Leader from 2019-2023. She holds a B.S. from West Virginia University and a master’s degree in nursing, leadership, and management from Western Governors University, and she worked as a registered nurse. In the community, she was affiliated with the West Virginia Farm Bureau, the West Virginia Cattleman’s Association, the Grafton Lions Club, and the Emergency Nurses Association.

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

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>Streak</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Craig Blair (R-15) | 4 Legislative Sessions | 5.75 | 6 Legislative Sessions |

Senator Craig Blair (R) of District 15 (Hampshire, Morgan, Berkeley, and Mineral counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 4 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 5.75 in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, Sen. Blair proposed 224 bills, 145 of which received action beyond committee, 115 passed the Senate, and 95 became law. Sen. Blair (as noted above) was the second highest-scoring Republican Senator in the last legislative session.

Sen. Blair assumed office in the Senate in 2012. Before serving in the Senate, Sen. Blair represented District 52 in the West Virginia House of Delegates. He served as the State Senate President/Lieutenant Governor from 2021-2024, when he left office in 2024. He has career experience working on his family farm and in the water-treatment industry. In 1993, he turned his small business, Sunset Water Services, into the largest water treatment provider in the Martinsburg area, serving over 20,000 customers. As of 2025, Sen. Blair assumed the role of Executive Director at West Virginians for Reliable and Affordable Energy, a coalition focused on strengthening the state's electrical grid.

High-Performing Freshmen

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Delegates 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 Delegates “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> |
|----|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Rick Hillenbrand (R-88) | 1.04 |

| | | |
|----|------------------------------|------|
| 2. | Michael Hornby (R-93) | 1.01 |
|----|------------------------------|------|

Delegate Rick Hillenbrand (Hampshire and Mineral counties) was the Delegate who had the highest SLES and who was also “Above Expectations” in lawmaking effectiveness during his freshman term, with a score of 1.04. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, Del. Hillenbrand introduced 15 bills, 6 of which received action beyond committee and passed the House of Delegates, and 5 became law.

Del. Hillenbrand is a United States Navy Veteran. While in the service, he served as a Naval Engineer and Project Manager. He holds a Bachelor of Engineering from the State University of New York Maritime College, and he earned two graduate degrees in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering and Ocean Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In the community, Del. Hillenbrand has been involved with the Boy Scouts of America, serving as a past National Capital Area Council Commissioner, and in various other leadership positions. He has received the Silver Buffalo status for his contributions.

Freshmen Senators “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> |
|----|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Jason Barrett (R-16) | 0.81 |

Senator Jason Barrett (Berkeley and Jefferson counties) had the highest SLES in the Senate and was also “Above Expectations” in lawmaking effectiveness during his freshman term, with a score of 0.81. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, Sen. Barrett introduced 29 bills, 13 of which received action beyond committee and passed the Senate, and 7 became law.

Before joining the Senate, Sen. Barrett represented the 61st District in the West Virginia House of Delegates from 2012-2014 and 2016-2022. Sen. Barrett switched from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 2020. He attended Shepherd University and owns a small business. In the community, he serves as a Board Member on both the Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center and the Eastern West Virginia Eastern Airport Authority.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, consistent with a majority-party advantage in most states, a pattern of partisan lawmaking is clearly on display in West Virginia. While the SLES of minority-party lawmakers across the country on the whole averages about 0.6, the average scores for minority-party Democrats in West Virginia in 2023-24 are somewhat lower than that in the House of Delegates at 0.43 and substantially lower in the Senate at a value of 0.24. Such exclusion of

minority-party members from a significant lawmaking role is not new, but stretches back to when Democrats held firm control of the legislature. Indeed, across the legislature as a whole, since the start of our data in 1993, the minority party has an average SLES of 0.30.

These partisan differences (coupled with the very small number of Democrats in the legislature) translate into a gap in the number of laws produced by Republicans relative to Democrats. Of the 1,031 laws produced in the 2023-24 sessions, only 11 of them were sponsored by Democrats. This nearly 100:1 ratio in laws coming from Republicans to those coming from Democrats is a much starker partisan difference than seen almost anywhere else in the country.

Conclusion

The 86th West Virginia Legislature 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 West Virginia.