



Highlights from the 113th Tennessee 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 113th Tennessee General Assembly legislative session. This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective lawmakers in both parties in the House of Representatives, the top-10 most effective lawmakers in the majority party in the Senate, and the top-3 most effective lawmakers in the minority party in the Senate. Many listed legislators continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking that they exhibited in the previous legislative session.
- We identify the top lawmaker across both chambers with the longest streak of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. Although some individual minority-party legislators achieved high lawmaking effectiveness, their average scores remain lower than their majority-party counterparts due to structural barriers that they face in trying to advance their agendas.
- We find that, although committee chair positions can enhance lawmaking ability, they are not used as extensively by members of the Tennessee General Assembly. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, in both chambers, committee chairs scored just slightly above average majority-party members in lawmaking effectiveness, indicating that solutions to policy problems come from a wide variety of members in Tennessee.
- Lawmaking effectiveness is a consistent trait among legislators, with several legislators appearing among the top-10 most effective lawmakers for both the 113th and 112nd General Assembly.

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 113th Tennessee General Assembly House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.55 compared to 1.15 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.39. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.67 in the minority party, 1.07 in the majority party, and 1.09 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 Tennessee General Assembly together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 113th Tennessee House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 113th House of Representatives. Two of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Republicans (113th Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	William Lamberth (District 44)	8.49	None
2.	John Ragan (District 33)	5.53	Chair
3.	Clark Boyd (District 46)	2.32	None
4.	Cameron Sexton (District 25)	2.28	None
5.	Mary Littleton (District 78)	2.27	None
6.	John Gillespie (District 97)	1.81	None
7.	Ed Butler (District 41)	1.66	None
8.	Rusty Grills (District 77)	1.65	None
9.	Lowell Russell (District 21)	1.61	None

10.	Sabi Kumar (District 66)	1.57	Chair
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At the top of the list is Representative William Lamberth from District 44 (Sumner County) with a score of 8.49. In the 113th legislative session, he introduced 144 bills, 124 received action in committee, 119 received action beyond committee, 52 passed the House of Representatives, and 47 became law.

Rep. Lamberth has served in the House of Representatives since 2013 and has been the House majority leader since 2019. Rep. Lamberth graduated from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville in 2001 and received his J.D. from the William & Mary School of Law in 2004. Prior to running for office, he was an Assistant District Attorney for Sumner County and now practices law as a private attorney in Gallatin, Tennessee. He is active in the community, as he was the former president of the Rotary Club of Gallatin, Tennessee and the Sumner County Bar Association, and the former treasurer of the Republican Party of Sumner County. He is also Chairman of the Portland Community Education Foundation. He also frequently participates in Christian missions to areas of the world in need of humanitarian relief.

Five Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. William Lamberth (District 44), Rep. John Ragan (District 33), Rep. Cameron Sexton (District 25), Rep. Mary Littleton (District 78), and Rep. Clark Boyd (District 46).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 113th Tennessee House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top ten highest scorers in the 113th House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (113th Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Antonio Parkinson (District 98)	1.28	7
2.	Bob Freeman (District 56)	1.07	3
3.	G.A. Hardaway (District 93)	0.97	9
4.	Torrey Harris (District 91)	0.95	2
5.	Karen Camper (District 87)	0.81	8
6.	Harold Love (District 58)	0.70	6
7.	Johnny Shaw (District 80)	0.66	12
8.	Darren Jernigan (District 60)	0.63	6
9.	Jason Powell (District 53)	0.55	6
10.	Justin Pearson (District 86)	0.53	1

Topping our list is Representative Antonio Parkinson of District 98 (Shelby County), with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 1.28. He introduced 40 bills in the 113th legislative session, 36 of which received action in committee, 19 of which received action beyond committee, 5 of which passed the House, and 4 of which became law. Rep. Parkinson has been serving in the House since 2011.

Prior to serving in the House, Rep. Parkinson was in the U.S. Marine Corps. After serving as a Marine, Rep. Parkinson joined the Shelby County Fire Department and served as Lieutenant before retiring. Currently, Rep. Parkinson owns Black Market Strategies, a public relations and marketing firm. In addition to his service in the House, Rep. Parkinson has founded multiple community advocacy initiatives including ABetterMemphis.com and the Block Park for Peace. He is the former chair of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators and the former Vice Chairman of the Democratic Caucus.

Six Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top 10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Darren Jernigan (District 60), Rep. Bob Freeman (District 56), Rep. Harold Love (District 58), Rep. Torrey Harris (District 91), Rep. Antonio Parkinson (District 98), and Rep. G.A. Hardaway (District 93).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 113th Tennessee State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 113th State Senate. Two of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (113th Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Jack Johnson (District 27)	2.98	None
2.	Kerry Roberts (District 23)	2.84	Chair
3.	Joseph Hensley (District 28)	1.43	None
4.	Ferrell Haile (District 18)	1.42	None
5.	Becky Massey (District 6)	1.41	None
6.	Page Walley (District 26)	1.30	None
7.	Shane Reeves (District 14)	1.27	None
8.	Brent Taylor (District 31)	1.23	None
9.	John Stevens (District 24)	1.18	None
10.	Jon Lundberg (District 4)	1.10	Chair

Among Republicans in the State Senate, Senator Jack Johnson from District 27 (Williamson County) ranked first with a SLES score of 2.98. In the 113th legislative session, he introduced 156 bills, 116 of which received action beyond committee, and 74 passed the Senate and became law.

Sen. Johnson has been in the Senate since 2007 and has served as the Senate majority leader since 2019. He holds a B.S. in education from Texas State University. He began his career with Third National Bank (now SunTrust) and eventually transitioned to the public relations and public affairs sector. Currently, he is a public relations professional for a Fortune 500 company with offices in Middle Tennessee. Jack and his wife, Deana, the Circuit Court Judge for the 21st Judicial District, have called Middle Tennessee home for over 30 years.

Six legislators on the list were among the top-10 highest scoring Senate Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Jack Johnson (District 27), Sen. Kerry Roberts (District 23), Sen. Joseph Hensley (District 28), Sen. Jon Lundberg (District 4), Sen. Ferrell Haile (District 18), and Sen. Becky Massey (District 6).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 113th Tennessee State Senate

The following table identifies the three highest scorers in the 113th State Senate among minority-party Democrats.

Top Three List—Senate Democrats (113th Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Raumesh Akbari (District 29)	1.05	3
2.	Jeff Yarbrow (District 21)	0.82	5
3.	Heidi Campbell (District 20)	0.70	2

Senator Raumesh Akbari from District 29 (Shelby County) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 113th legislative session with a score of 1.05. She introduced 206 bills, 37 received of which received action in committee, 30 received action beyond committee, 18 passed the Senate, and 15 became law.

Sen. Akbari joined the Senate in 2023 and was previously a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives for the 91st District. Sen. Akbari graduated with a B.A. in African American studies and a minor in political science from Washington University in St. Louis and received a J.D. from St. Louis University School of Law. She currently directs legal affairs and human resources for Akbari Corp., a small business founded by her parents. She also assists her family in running their other businesses, the World Trichology Institute and Lisa Akbari Hair Care Products.

Two legislators on the list were among the top-3 highest scoring Senate Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Raumesh Akbari (District 29) and Sen. Jeff Yarbrow (District 21).

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 113th legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 113th Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (113th)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	William Lamberth (R-44)	6 Legislative Sessions	8.49	6 Legislative Sessions
2.	Mary Littleton (R-78)	3 Legislative Sessions	2.27	6 Legislative Sessions

Representative William Lamberth (R) of District 44 (Sumner County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 6 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 8.49 in the 113th legislative session. Rep. Lamberth has been among the top-3 most effective Republican lawmakers in the House since 2013.

**State Senators with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 113th Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (113th)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Jack Johnson (R-27)	3 Legislative Sessions	2.98	9 Legislative Sessions
2.	Kerry Roberts (R-23)	3 Legislative Sessions	2.84	5 Legislative Sessions
3.	Raumesh Akbari (D-29)	3 Legislative Sessions	1.05	3 Legislative Sessions

Senator Jack Johnson (R) of District 27 (Williamson County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 3 legislative sessions, and a SLES score of 2.98 in the 113th legislative session. Sen. Johnson has consistently ranked among the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the Tennessee Senate since 2009.

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 Representatives “Exceeding Expectations” (113th Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES (in 113th)</u>
1.	Ed Butler (R-41)	1.66
2.	Monty Fritts (R-32)	1.55
3.	Brock Martin (R-79)	1.49
4.	Justin Pearson (D-86)	0.53

The top-performing freshman was Representative Ed Butler of District 41 (Overton and Morgan counties) with a SLES score of 1.66. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, he proposed 39 bills, 34 of which received action in committee, 25 of which received action beyond committee, and 8 of which passed the House and became law. Rep. Butler was ranked in the top-10 most effective Republican Representatives during the 2023-2024 session.

Rep. Butler is a U.S. Navy veteran, small business owner and fire sprinkler contractor. Rep. Butler is active in the community and served for several years on the Executive Board of Adult and Teen Challenge of the Upper Cumberland. In his personal life, he is an active member of the Livingston Life Church and has served on several overseas Christian missions.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, the lawmaking power of committee chairs is not used as extensively to advance self-sponsored legislation in the Tennessee General Assembly relative to most other states. As such, the enhanced lawmaking effectiveness of committee chairs was relatively small in Tennessee in the 2023-2024 term. For example, the average SLES of committee chairs in the House for 2023-2024 was 1.39, the lowest level for committee chairs since the beginning of our data in 1995. This translates to the average committee chair producing less than 6 laws each, compared to nearly 13 laws per committee chair back in 2011-2012.

A similar pattern emerges in the Senate. The average SLES for chairs of 1.09 in 2023-2024 is not noticeably different from an average member of the majority party. On average, Senate committee chairs produced about 26 laws each from their sponsored bills in 2023-2024, compared to a 24-law average for other Republicans. This points to a legislative process in which ideas for legislative solutions to policy problems come from a wide variety of members.

Conclusion

The 113th Tennessee General Assembly demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators 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 Tennessee.