

# **What Have You Gotten Yourself Into?**

A Guide for New Legislative Leaders

**STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS FOUNDATION  
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## THE STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS FOUNDATION

The State Legislative Leaders Foundation is an independent national, nonprofit, nonpartisan, organization established in 1972 as an educational resource for the leaders of our state legislatures—an elite group of approximately 350 House Speakers, Senate Presidents, Majority Leaders, Minority Leaders and Pro Tempores.

We accomplish our mission by:

- organizing university-based educational programs for State Legislative Leaders on critical public policy issues and elements of leadership and governance;
- bringing leaders together to share information and ideas with one another;
- conducting research on leadership trends and public policy;
- publishing political reference texts, newsletters and materials to help leaders improve their performance;
- and always striving to broaden the horizons of the men and women who lead our nation's state legislatures.

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# What Have You Gotten Yourself Into? A Guide for New Legislative Leaders

*At the end of my first day as Speaker, my Clerk looked over and said, "How the hell did we get through the day?" When you first step in, it is daunting. How do you make committee assignments? Assign Chairs? You have all of these requests in front of you and they all seem to have merit. You have never had to be the final decision maker until now. That is hard. It is all up to you.*

The Honorable Raymond Sanchez  
Speaker of the New Mexico House, 1983-2001

## ❖ Introduction

Congratulations! The day you were selected to lead your legislative party or institution, you joined a select group of men and women like no other in the world. You are now part of an exclusive group of public servants known as legislative leaders. There are but 350 of you (by our count) and though you come from all walks of life with as many different ideas and beliefs as one can find in this great land of ours, you share some very strong common bonds with your fellow legislative leaders across the country.

In fact, we think you will be amazed to find out just how much you have in common with say, the Speaker of the House in South Carolina, or the Senate President in Colorado, or the Minority Leader in California. As you will soon read, these men and women speak your language, understand your problems, and have ideas that will resonate with you better than anybody else, with the possible exception of your spouse!

This brief book will talk about those bonds of leadership through the words of men and women who have been there before you and who have learned from their experiences. I encourage you to see what they have to say for there truly are “pearls of wisdom” sprinkled throughout these pages. More than that, I encourage you to pick up the phone and call them.

And finally, and this is a bit of a commercial . . . come to an SLLF program! Join us on the campus of a prestigious university as we discuss and debate the critical issues of the day. The programs are top notch, as your peers will tell you, and you’ll get to spend quality time with great people.

About this book.

Over the past four decades, we have worked with literally thousands of legislative leaders. We’ve had the good fortune of observing them in their work, at our programs and we’ve even written case studies about them. For this book, we decided to select a group of legislative leaders we find particularly adept at their jobs. These are leaders who have won and retained office (always a good measure of success), accomplished good things for their chamber, the legislature, and the people, and earned the respect of their peers. Though the list of those we quote is not all inclusive, it is fairly representative of the exceptional men and women who do the jobs you do.

The leaders who contributed to this publication reflect the diversity that is legislative leadership in the fifty states: Republicans and Democrats, men and women, liberals and conservatives and all stripes in between. They come from large states and small and from all walks of life. There are farmers and lawyers, doctors and small business owners, teachers and union people. Some are new leaders, others have been here for a while. And they all have something to say to you!

*What Have I Gotten Myself Into?* is organized in three sections.

Section I focuses on the early days, as you're just taking over the job. Here you will find pithy observations from leaders about the decisions you need to make before the session begins. Issues like: How best to make committee assignments? How to select committee chairs? What can you do to help build a sense of teamwork and camaraderie among your members? How do you get them from campaigners and possibly political adversaries to policy makers and colleagues? How do you balance everything so you have time for your work, time for your family and time for yourself?

Section II offers more good insights on how to maintain good and productive relations with your colleagues. What can I do to establish credibility as an effective and fair leader? How do I respond to the myriad of challenges and occasional crises that will inevitably arise? What strategies work best to help me forge and maintain effective and mutually trusting relationships with leaders in the other chamber, the other party and other branches of government?

In the final section of our little book of knowledge, we will discuss strategies you can employ to help insure that you leave the legislature a better place than when you entered it. How do you make a lasting and positive contribution to the institution? What's important here? Being a leader for your party, the chamber, the legislature, the people? Can you do it all? Should you try? Are you interested in leaving a legacy? Do you want to be remembered for what you did to improve civility, to get the people's business done in an orderly fashion, to hang new drapes in the chamber?

And, what about your exit strategy? One day you will be leaving this august body and all the trappings of leadership. Should you even bother to think about this now? And if you do think about it, what should you take into account and when is the best time to exit the stage?

It's all here!

Carry the leaders guide with you on business trips, glance through it in your spare moments. If something piques your interest, give a call to the leader who said it. You will be pleasantly surprised at what you learn.

## **SECTION I: PREPARING TO LEAD**

Once you are certain of your election as a legislative leader, you should begin immediately to lay the groundwork for your upcoming term of office. Specific actions you take in the days and weeks before the legislature formally convenes can pay significant dividends throughout your tenure. Indeed, first impressions can make all the difference in the world with your colleagues as well as the Executive, the media and the public. In the pages to follow, are several activities in which other leaders have engaged during this pre-session time that have made their transition to leadership much more successful.

## ❖ Prepare Yourself



*“This job is like nothing you have ever experienced. It pulls you all over the place. You are everybody's rabbi, and priest and counselor. There is an interesting dynamic at that level about how people treat you differently. People make you like a father figure and they project all of their problems on you.”*

*The Honorable Robert M. Hertzberg, Speaker of the California Assembly, 2000-2002*

As you have no doubt already discovered, the job of being a legislative leader is, to put it mildly, complicated. You worry not only about your constituents and your career, but also about the careers, and in many cases the personal lives, of your members. Plus you are now an administrator for your office and if you're the presiding officer, the chamber. You're the chief spokesperson; it's to you that your members turn to build working coalitions on any given issue, to help forge compromises when needed, to travel the state attending fundraisers for your members, to speak before civic and social groups, welcome guests and through it all, always smile and be happy.

How do you do all this?

**Be Yourself.** Leadership is personal and your leadership style must reflect who you are. If your style is contrary to your personality, your members will recognize it and likely will challenge you. It is not necessary for you to try and lead like your predecessor, no matter how successful he or she was. You are not that person. Your leadership must be an extension of who you are, reflecting your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses. Trust the skills and instincts that have gotten you this far.

**Stop, Look and Listen.** Stop! Slow down long enough to think about the skills you will need to lead your institution effectively. Try to see the big picture. Remember, your goal as leader is to lead your party, and, if you are a presiding officer, your chamber. Look! Look for publications, organizations and websites that can provide ideas on leadership, process and policies that you might utilize to develop your strengths. Listen! Take advantage of the rich experiences of former and present legislative leaders, well-respected lobbyists and public advocates. Ask questions.

**Proceed With Caution.** People will hear you differently when you become a legislative leader. Exercise caution in making promises and commitments to anyone. Be careful even in casual conversation because your polite "maybe" could be interpreted as a "yes" by an eager legislator or lobbyist.

**Plan to Succeed.** As a new leader you will soon discover how easy it is to get caught up in the daily minutiae of leadership. Therefore, it is a good idea to write down your goals and refer to them frequently lest you forget why you wanted this job in the first place. It's easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees.

## ❖ Build or Cement Personal Relationships



*“Establish strong personal contact with the senators and always listen to them. People want to be heard, constituents or members. Even if I do not agree with them, I let them be heard. It is rare that I ever cut a member off on the floor. Over time you develop a reputation of being fair that makes a difference. You have a good relationship with your members.”*

*The Honorable Earl Ray Tomblin, President, West Virginia Senate, 1991–Present*

Above all else, legislative leadership is personal. You were elected as much or more for who you are as a person as for what people believe you will do as a leader. This is especially true when you are elected the first time. It is critical that you get to know your members and their districts so you can work more effectively with them and understand what makes them tick. Over the course of your tenure, you will come to recognize that your job is similar to that of a member of the clergy—you will hear confessions, pleas for help or special assistance, and personal problems. The challenge is to be an empathetic counselor while still maintaining the ability to say no. These tips should help.

**Visit the Districts of Your Members.** The best way to understand the pressures that your members face is to visit their districts and talk with their constituents. One first term leader knew he would be the next Speaker well before the session began and, from that point on, he accepted every offer to speak in the districts of his members. This policy gave him a chance not only to get to know his members better, but also to learn about their districts and the issues that the members' constituents judged most important. Such knowledge gave him credibility and forged bonds of trust, understanding and respect with his legislative colleagues.

**Take Your Members Out or Bring Them In.** This pre-session time is also critical for establishing social relationships with new members or strengthening relationships with returning ones. One former Speaker noted that once it was clear he would be the new Speaker, he invited newly elected legislators to his home for dinner in groups of six until he had met with all of them. The fact that the dinner conversations strayed far from politics enabled him to find out what his members liked, what they needed, and what would motivate them to action.

**Meet with the Members One-on-One.** While some leaders engage their members in social settings, others prefer a more personal approach, choosing instead to meet privately with each member. Such meetings can be held in your office, the member's office, a more neutral location, or even over the phone. Make the conversation personal regardless of the location. Whether you are in your office, their office, or even calling them at home, be sure to inquire as to their well being and that of their families. The bottom line: you must work to build personal relationships.

## ❖ Bring New Members Into the Fold



*"Make sure you focus on your new members. If you get to know them early and listen to their concerns, they can be some of your strongest allies in years to come."*

*The Honorable Bobby Harrell, Speaker of the House, South Carolina, 2005-present*

One of the most significant challenges you will face is the number of new legislators who come into office with precious little understanding of the legislative process and of the breadth of issues they must soon deliberate upon. How do you prepare these men and women for the job they are about to undertake?

**Conduct a Thorough Orientation.** New members need to learn the intricacies of the legislative process as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Almost all legislatures now hold new member orientation programs sometime between the election and the opening day of the session. These programs range from one day to two weeks. Some focus completely on orienting freshman members about the legislature, while others include returning members and cover important policy issues that may surface during the session. Involve your senior members and former legislators in the development and implementation of the program. It is also helpful to include a mock floor session in your program so that new members have an opportunity to use "legislative language," address the chamber, and use the microphones in a non-threatening environment. Even if your chamber already conducts an orientation, evaluate that orientation in light of the needs of the incoming class of legislators. You may find it helpful for evaluating and improving your orientation to contact leaders in other states as well as legislative organizations such as the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLLF), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the Council of State Governments (CSG).

**Establish Mentoring Programs.** The most valuable resource you have for orienting your new members is your incumbent and former members. Take full advantage of this resource by assigning senior members to work with new members. These mentoring relationships should be established as soon as practical following the election. Indeed, some legislative leaders make such assignments before the general elections for members from districts their party is likely to win in the general election. Such relationships help new legislators feel much more a part of the institution and can build a level of esprit de corps that will be useful when the tough votes come.

**Introduce Members to the Diversity of the State and its Challenges.** New legislators will usually come to the capitol with a district-oriented view of state issues. They can tell you everything about their own district, right down to the high school soccer champion, but they cannot tell you the number one product or problem of the state. You must impress on them the need to appreciate the statewide scope of their responsibilities. An increasingly popular method of doing this is to take them on a bipartisan tour of the state, as is done in Maryland and Arkansas. If you are in a geographically large state, and such a trip is not feasible, you might consider having members from very different parts of the state visit each other's districts, as members of the Michigan House of Representatives do each year.

## ❖ Prepare Your Family and the Families of Your New Members



*“One of the things we do is to bring the spouses together. My wife and the wife of the Senate president hosted a lunch for the spouses. It helped members so much because now their spouses understand the process and they are meeting other people that also never get to see their husband or wife. They realize they are not alone. I have had so many members say this has made my life so much easier because my husband or wife now understand what I do and are more understanding of how this process works.”*

*The Honorable Shane Broadway, Speaker of the House, Arkansas, 2001-2003*

The transition from private citizen to public life can be jarring. As a leader, you have a responsibility to prepare the families of all your newly elected colleagues for the challenges that lie ahead. Likewise, you owe it to your family, and especially your spouse, to let them know what they can expect. Not only do you have a new role as a legislative leader, but your family's and especially your spouse's world will be changed. When you are frustrated about a member, the governor, the press or any thorny issue, chances are your family will know it. When you can't make a Little League game because a leadership meeting runs long, they feel it. When the press writes a negative or inaccurate story about you, your family may be affected more deeply than anyone else. You must prepare them for this new world.

**Have a Family Meeting.** Before you accept the leadership position, it is critical that you discuss it with your family, especially your spouse. If your spouse is not supportive of your decision to run for leadership, you may need to reconsider. Make sure he or she understands what you are getting into. Your new responsibilities will mean less time at home, less privacy, and more media attention. Your family needs to realize that the spotlight shining on you is also likely to reflect on them.

**Include Spouses in Your Orientation Program.** More and more legislatures are including a spouses program as part of their new member orientation. Wives and husbands of newly elected legislators are seldom prepared for the impact that their spouse's service in the legislature is going to have on themselves and their families – dinners alone, late night phone calls from irate constituents, extensive weekend commitments, and ethics and conflict of interest laws restriction on their activities.

**Make Sure Spouses Know the Law.** In almost every state, portions of the ethics statutes that apply to legislators also have application to the legislator's spouse, and sometimes also to dependent children. So, if your new member orientation program includes a session for spouses, make sure to include an explanation of all ethics and conflict of interest laws that apply to legislators and their family members. Just as leaders are scrutinized more intensely than rank-and-file members, so too are the families of the leaders. Family members of a leader must be keenly aware of the ethics laws, because their failure to abide by them can do significant harm not only to the leader, but to the institution that he or she leads.

## ❖ Surround Yourself with Good People



*"You hold a public office, and the office is more than just you. Your staff are a reflection of you in everything they do, everything they say, and the demeanor they exhibit. If they are professional and courteous, you will get credit for that. If they are rude, inefficient, indifferent, conniving or otherwise less than professional, you will be blamed for that. Surrounding yourself with good people who reflect what you want your office to be is one of the most fundamentally important things you will do."*

*The Honorable Derek Schmidt, Senate Majority Leader, Kansas, 2005-present*

Perhaps no early decisions are more critical to your success as a leader than your selection of the people who will serve as your key assistants. You must feel comfortable delegating decisions and responsibilities to them. They must be both loyal and competent. What they do and how they do it will reflect on you.

**Pick the Best Person for the Job.** Choose the best-qualified person for any given job. He or she may be a close friend and "comrade in arms" or simply well qualified for the position with no direct personal or political relationship to you. If the former possesses all the requisite skills, the choice is easy. However, if this person's chief qualification is friendship and not job expertise, then you should select the latter. Appointing a friend who is unable to do the job causes problems for you, your friend, your caucus and your institution.

**Don't Clean House Unnecessarily.** When people take over a new position, there is a natural desire to clean house – out with the old, in with the new. Try to resist the temptation to do this. If you are taking over the majority from the other party, few will expect you to keep your predecessors staff in political posts. However, it may be useful to keep some of them in clerical or technical posts. Further, if you are succeeding a leader from your own party, it is generally helpful to keep some of your predecessor's staff in place. Often, it is these senior staff members who possess the kind of institutional memory on which you will come to depend. Also, experienced staff can give you added legitimacy with more senior members during your first weeks in office. You will, of course, want to make sure that the staff will support you, but you should not automatically assume that your predecessor's staff will not.

**Reward Loyal Staff.** Without qualified staff, you would have not gotten to this point. Take care of them if you can. Even though you can't reward all of your loyal staff with key positions, you can reward them in other ways. Use other perks at your disposal – promotions, raises, bigger offices, better parking spaces, even new titles. Most leaders have control over many administrative and staff positions that are filled on a partisan basis. Use this influence to your advantage.

## ❖ Realize the Value of Your Time



*"I didn't really recognize at first that I wasn't going to be able to push as much legislation personally as I always have. I had to give up some things that I wanted to do in terms of legislation for the good of the body, for the time that is required to keep the body rolling and moving. I'll spend the majority of my time on the speaker role, and it does take more time."*

*The Honorable Curt Bromm, Speaker, Nebraska Legislature, 2002-2005*

Legislators are very busy people and are rarely in full control of their own time. They must read countless bills, amendments and reports; they deal with all manner of constituencies in and outside of the legislature; they attend meetings, often from morning until late in the evening – weekends included; they deliberate in committee and on the floor and cast their votes on issues that affect thousands if not millions of citizens. And on top of all these activities, many are husbands or wives, moms or dads and some have other careers they balance with their public responsibilities. Legislative leaders are even busier! If they are presiding officers, in addition to everything else they do as legislators, they have tremendous responsibilities to the chamber they lead and the legislative institution they serve. The bottom line is if you are a legislative leader, you need to organize your time in a manner that balances your professional responsibilities with your personal responsibilities. This, as you probably already know, is no easy task.

**Determine What is Important To You and Your Members.** When you take on the responsibilities of leadership, something has to give. Even leaders have only twenty-four hours in a day! You must set priorities and, in setting your priorities, you need to keep in mind the expectations of the legislators who selected you and all the other constituencies who demand your attention and time. Some of your own priorities may have to be temporarily set aside or dropped altogether in the interest of building sustainable compromises that benefit the legislature and your constituents. And you may no longer be able to expend so much energy developing expertise in numerous policy areas or attending every function in your district.

**Delegate!** It is up to you to get to know your members well enough to determine their strengths and weaknesses and give them tasks that take advantage of their strengths and minimize the consequences of their weaknesses. You may choose a trusted colleague to work on an issue of particular interest to you or to manage the flow of legislation or to work with the new committee chairs. Find out what your members do well and then put them into the game in the right position. If they look good, you look good. If they do well, you do well.

**Let Members Do Their Jobs.** It is not enough just to delegate jobs to your members. You have to give them the freedom and resources to do those jobs. If you are constantly looking over their shoulders or second-guessing them, you will soon be overwhelmed and they will resent the interference. If you have selected the best people give them what they need and then let them do their jobs. If you detect missteps (as you certainly will in the rough and tumble of the legislative arena) then you must intervene and make the appropriate changes. But always treat your colleagues with respect and dignity, especially when relieving them of a coveted committee post or other assignment. Reputations are the most important possession of any public person.

## ❖ Rebuild Burnt Bridges



*"In a single word, 'compromise' defines the legislative process. Whether it's between the differing factions of a legislative caucus, the majority and minority parties within a legislative chamber or a bicameral legislature's respective representatives, effective leadership requires consensus-building and communication. In the absence thereof, legislative leaders are incapable of serving their members, thereby jeopardizing both their personal standing and their conference's electoral viability."*

*The Honorable Dean G. Skelos, New York State Senate Deputy Majority Leader, 1994-2008  
New York State Senate Minority Leader, 2008-present*

It is a political fact of life that elections, whether to the legislature or to a position of leadership within it, create enemies. Unquestionably, the increasingly personal and negative nature of campaigns and elections has complicated the leader's job. The transition from campaign opponents to cooperative policymakers is often far more difficult to bridge because of bitter personal attacks leveled during the campaign. Ill will and hard feelings left over from personal, competitive campaigns are hard to forget. What to do?

**Co-opt the Opposition.** Whether from your party, the loyal opposition, the Governor, or an influential special interest, prolonged opposition does not serve your interests or the legislature's. One leader suggested that he found the best way to deal with those who supported someone else for his job was to give him or her the best possible office assignments, committee assignments, bills, etc. His reasoning was that if they got much of what they wanted, it would be harder for them to continue to oppose his leadership. His re-election two years later was unanimous.

**Provide Opportunities for Bipartisan Interaction.** Much of the political animosity between legislators arises from the fact that they often see each other as ideologues or partisans rather than as legislators who are all trying to do what is best for the state. To move beyond labels and stereotypes, you must provide opportunities for the members of your chamber to get to know one another. Most legislative orientations are bipartisan and provide opportunities for legislators of both parties and all ideologies to build relationships. Leaders in Alabama host a barbecue contest between various partisan and ethnic caucuses. Bipartisan tours of the state, noted above, foster similar familiarity in Arkansas and Maryland. In West Virginia, senators have a "Members Only Lounge" near the Senate floor where friendships across party lines are developed and fostered.

**Break Down the Walls.** It is not enough that the rank-and-file members spend time getting to know each other. You must establish a framework for minority and majority leadership to communicate as well. Upon taking his position, one Southern legislative leader established weekly meetings between the party leaders from the House and Senate to discuss the calendar for the week and issues likely to arise on the floor. Such interactions not only coordinate activities, but also help leaders build bridges across ideological or partisan divides.

## ❖ Choose Your Committee Chairs Wisely



*“As a new speaker, you have to make sure that you appoint strong committee chairs that are your people. The committee chairs have to be people you can depend on to do the job and be on your side. If they don't do a good job, then you look bad. The committee chairs have to be competent people that you can trust.”*

*The Honorable William J. Murphy, Speaker of the Rhode Island House, 2003-Present*

Any general is only as good as his or her lieutenants and any legislative leader is only as good as his or her committee chairs. Committee chairpersons are vital to a leader's success. With strong, able and trusted committee chairs, a leader can turn his or her attention to other matters without worrying that the legislative work will not get done.

**Find Out What Your Members Have to Offer.** Take the time to get to know your members so that you can assess their strengths and weaknesses and make the best use of their talents, abilities and skills. Most state legislatures are comprised of farmers, teachers, bankers, businessmen and women, insurance agents, lawyers and representatives from many other fields. Sit down with each of these members and find out where they can make the best contribution to the chamber and to your caucus. This knowledge will enable you to place members in positions where they can flourish and serve the institution most effectively.

**Don't Make Promises You Cannot (or Should Not) Keep.** Perhaps the most difficult thing for anyone to do is to tell a friend 'no.' And yet, not everyone can be (or should be) on Appropriations or Rules or Judiciary or Finance. According to one leader, "One of the problems that often occurs is that to get the leadership position, you have to promise everybody everything. But, the person that helped you get elected may not be the best person to do the job that he or she wants." It is up to you to make sure that the members you place in positions of responsibility have the desire and capacity to meet the obligations of that position. Not everyone should be the chair of a key committee. Offer your supporters something. But it does not have to be a prized committee position that they may want but that could prove an embarrassment to you and to them.

**Satisfy as Many Members as Possible.** When making committee designations, it is in the best interest of the legislature to satisfy as many members and fill as many requests as possible without, of course, sacrificing the integrity of the legislature. The reality is that many committee assignments, and even the chairmanships of some committees, are not critical to the success of the legislature. A weak chair on a minor committee can do little harm. Even though you may not particularly like him or her, a rural legislator belongs on the Agriculture committee and a legislator from a depressed urban area belongs on the Economic Development committee. Members who are on committees in which they are interested and comfortable are less likely to cause problems.



## SECTION II: ESTABLISHING YOUR LEADERSHIP

Apart from your wedding day or the day you became a parent, no single day in your life may be charged with more overwhelming emotions than the day you bang the gavel for the first time as the presiding officer of your chamber. There is the excitement associated with the power and the potential impact you may have on public policy in your state and the nation. There is the "rush" of wielding that gavel and the control that it gives you over others. There is the realization that all eyes are on you and will be as long as you hold the position and the power that goes with it. You always live with the concern that you will do something wrong, make a procedural gaff or commit a political blunder that will diminish your effectiveness as a leader. As you embark on this venture, there are some practical steps that you can take during your first few weeks in office that can set the tone for your tenure and greatly enhance your chance of leaving a legacy of success.



*"One piece of advice that I would pass on to a new leader is to take charge and not wait to simply respond to what lands in your box. You need to decide at the outset what are your goals and your priorities. Otherwise, your entire time as leader is going to be taken up with other peoples' agendas. Know what you want to accomplish and let your caucus know where you want to go. I think the minority will even appreciate and respect such openness and directness because it will tell them clearly what they are up against."*

*The Honorable John Andrews, President of the Colorado Senate, 2003-2005*

Whether your predecessor was in place for twenty years or two years, in your first weeks and months in office, you will likely be judged against him or her. Therefore, you must establish your independence and authority as early as possible. Fellow legislators, lobbyists, members of the media, the public and the executive branch must all understand that you are now in control.

**Put Your Stamp on the Rules.** While the legislature's formal rules of procedure tend to change little from session to session, it is your prerogative as leader to make modifications to them that you consider appropriate and necessary. A relatively minor change or interpretation in the rules of operation or organization can have significant consequences for the legislative process and put your stamp on the institution. One new leader who wanted a more orderly and efficient chamber changed the rules to require all committee meetings to begin on time. This minor change significantly altered the legislative culture. Another responded to complaints about conflicting committee meetings by dividing committees into two groups, each meeting on different days. Another leader increased his chamber's efficiency by putting its very limited staff to work on bills that were likely to get serious consideration rather than working on bills with no future. The chamber was more efficient, the bills better and the leader deemed a procedural reformer.

**Be Decisive on the Floor.** Presiding over floor proceedings is the most visible aspect of your job. You must make clear, decisive rulings on floor recognition, motions and bill assignments. Hesitation may be viewed as weakness. Know the rules that govern your chamber and acquire a thorough knowledge of acceptable floor behavior. One leader noted that his first act as presiding officer was to remove a long time committee chair who challenged his right as leader to appoint committee members. In announcing the removal of the committee chair on the floor, this leader, who went on to serve 18 years as presiding officer, established immediately that he was in control.

**Establish Appropriate Decorum.** Many leaders, especially those taking over after a long serving leader, often find that behavior on and around the floor has become inappropriate for "the people's chamber." Legislators, journalists, lobbyists or visitors in the gallery may behave in a manner that is not conducive to discussion and debate. Upon taking over a few years ago, an Ohio leader restricted lobbyists to the area outside of the chamber, a step similarly taken by leaders in a number of other chambers. In another state, food and drink were no longer allowed on the floor. In another, a new House Speaker required members to leave the chamber to make or receive calls on their cell phones. Rules for appropriate behavior established and enforced early will place your stamp on the culture of your chamber for your entire leadership tenure.

## ❖ Develop Effective Media Relations



*"The media is always a friend or a foe. Follow the SLLF guide to media relations and you can keep the media your friends, rather than your foes."*

*The Honorable Tom Deadrick, Speaker of the House, South Dakota, 2007-2009*

In the heady first days of leadership, it is easy to be seduced by members of the press. For much of your legislative career as a rank-and-file legislator, they probably did not even know your name. Now, as leader you find them calling you and wanting your opinion on every piece of legislation, story or news item. All of a sudden, the reporter that once did not return your calls is now calling you to speak on behalf of the whole legislature.

**Talk to Reporters on Your Turf.** Take time to chat informally with reporters. Such conversations can go a long way toward establishing cordial working relationships. Invitations to journalists and reporters to stop by for a visit in your office will be greatly appreciated and sometimes returned with a favorable report or story. In addition to formal press conferences, leaders in many states hold periodic informal sessions (a brown bag lunch in Ohio, popcorn and soda every Friday in Arkansas, beer and pretzels on Thursday evenings in Delaware) in which reporters are invited to come and ask questions and just "hang out" with the legislative leaders.

**You Do the Work.** Most state legislative reporters are not Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw or Bill O'Reilly. They are not high profile, not well staffed and not highly paid. Their time and knowledge of the legislative process is usually limited and anything you can do to save them time or effort will contribute to a better story. They will certainly appreciate assistance from a legislator that enables them to avoid having to undertake more time-consuming efforts to locate information. And such appreciation will sometimes weave its way into the reporter's newspaper, television, or radio report.

**Assume That Everything Said To A Reporter Is "On The Record."** Most journalists and reporters have a strong respect for journalistic ethics and will not quote or attribute a statement to an individual if they are first told that the words are "off the record" or "not for attribution." But the possibility always exists that a reporter may not hear the legislator's stipulation and, even if he or she does, a good reporter will find a way of getting you on record. And, there is always the risk of encountering that rare exception, the reporter who, in the drive to get a headline story, will simply disregard or ignore any agreement to speak off the record. Therefore, consider anything said to a reporter to be fair game. But if you believe a reporter has treated you unfairly, do not hesitate to demand a retraction, withhold further information from the reporter, or contact his or her editor.

## ❖ Build Productive External Relationships



*"Legislative leaders can never have too many allies. Take the time and effort to build a strong network of people outside the chamber in both the private and public sector. They can provide support and advice when necessary. They can be a source for new ideas and provide the framework and opportunity to develop comprehensive solutions to complex public policy challenges. They can become part of the team that enables you to improve the lives of the people in your state."*

*The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr., President, Maryland Senate, 1987-Present*

Obviously, much of the focus of state legislative leaders has to be internal, making sure the legislative institution functions effectively and efficiently. However, successful leaders also have to look outside the legislature and build relationships with key representatives of the public and private sectors. Often the most effective solution to a problem is one that brings together a broad cross-section of society. The best legislative leaders understand they cannot stand alone, and use the power of their office and personality to bring to bear every resource on the problem at hand. As a legislative leader, you are in a unique position to bring together people from all perspectives – from the public and private sectors of society.

**Strive to be Inclusive.** The most successful leaders continually work to build relationships with their colleagues—even when sharp partisan differences make comity difficult. As a leader you must be especially sensitive to the other point of view, always seeking to find common ground, with the goal of forging consensus. Make clear in your words and your deeds that you are willing to listen to all perspectives. Small things like leaving your office door open part of the time or spending some time walking the halls and listening to colleagues and constituents can go a long way in establishing the strong emphasis that you place on involving others in your decisions. Of course, in the process of being inclusive, one must never sacrifice his or her experience or moral convictions.

**Be Proactive – Bring People Together.** Make things happen. If you believe a problem can be effectively addressed only by bringing a diverse group of people to the table, then take the initiative to make it happen. Set up the meeting and give everybody an opportunity to discuss the issue. Take as large a role as necessary to make sure the meeting stays focused and on point. Then step back and let the people you have brought together find the solutions or compromises that best serve your state and the people that you represent.

**Take Advantage of Technology.** While face-to-face meetings are effective in sharing ideas and building cooperative efforts, they are not the only way in this era of technological advances. If it is not feasible to physically gather key constituencies in one place, video-conferencing or teleconferencing are becoming acceptable (and sometimes preferable) alternatives. Make use of email and "chat rooms" and maintain a user-friendly and updated website that gives your constituents a clear picture of what you stand for and how you are working for their benefit.

## ❖ Establish an Effective Relationship with the Governor



*"I think the first thing we need to do is to show that we're willing to cooperate with the new Governor. The election is over, he won, and we need to review his programs and keep Tennessee on the move. Now if we think he's wrong, we'll point that out. But rather than play partisan politics, we should let him get his feet on the ground. As long as he's making a positive effort for Tennessee, then we'll make a positive effort for him."*

*The Honorable Ben Atchley, Minority Leader, Tennessee Senate, 1991-2005*

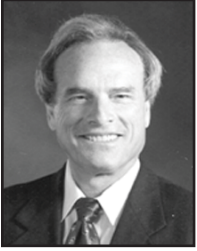
One of the most vexing relationships for new leaders is with the Governor. If you and the Governor are of the same party, you will want to be cooperative without sacrificing institutional autonomy. If the Governor is of the opposing party, you want to make sure that the positions and views of your party and caucus are effectively represented without causing gridlock that may cripple the state and anger the voters.

**Play to Your Institutional Strengths.** While your Governor will have significant tools at his or her disposal, you are not exactly defenseless. Remember the prerogatives of the legislative branch. With very few exceptions, the Governor can sign no legislation that has not passed muster in both chambers of the legislature. He or she can influence the legislative process, but not initiate it. While Governors in most states propose the budget, it is the legislature that enacts the budget and appropriates the funds to support it. As one leader reminded a rather aggressive new Governor, "You might write the checks, but we have the deposit slips!"

**Initiate Regular Meetings with the Executive.** It is imperative that you establish good lines of communication with the Governor at the very beginning of the legislative session. Many top leaders, often accompanied by other key leaders from both parties, hold regular meetings with the Governor and other executive branch officials throughout the legislative session. While the opening portions of these meetings may be open to the press, substantive discussions are almost always closed, allowing for the exchange of information regarding legislative status, schedules and political timing. While meetings with the Governor are generally held in the Governor's office, try to make sure that meetings with any other executive branch officials are held in your offices—the symbolic message of holding the meetings on your turf can be important.

**Don't Put All Your Cards on the Table.** For Governors and executive branch officials, just as for legislative leaders, information is power. While you want to communicate openly with the executive branch, especially if the Governor is a political or partisan ally, that does not mean you have to tell him or her everything. It is not necessary that the Governor know everything that you plan to do during the session or the exact support in your caucus on an issue of importance. One senior leader suggested that in dealing with the Governor, it is imperative that "you never tell him your number one priority. If he knows that, then he or she will hold it over your head or out in front of you during the entire session."

## ❖ Find Balance with the Other Chamber



*“Weekly meetings, with leaders of both chambers present, have proved helpful in coordinating agendas for consideration of bills, special events, joint sessions, exploring the strength of opposition to bills, and monitoring executive branch activities regarding legislation.”*

*The Honorable Seth Hammett, Speaker of the House, Alabama, 1999-present*

In every state except Nebraska, the legislative institution is bicameral, composed of a Senate and a House or Assembly. No matter how effectively you manage your own chamber, no bill can become law without the support of at least a majority of the members of the other chamber and, often the support of the Governor. One of your primary responsibilities as a legislative leader is to help forge compromises. To do so, you need to be able to work effectively with your counterparts in the other chamber. But in the bargain, as Seth Hammett notes, you have to always keep in mind the independence of your chamber. It is a delicate, but essential balancing act.

**Build a Personal Relationship with your Counterpart.** It is imperative that you establish a strong personal relationship with the leader of the other chamber, even if he or she is of the other party. One of your first calls you should make upon becoming leader is to the leader of the other party (if he or she has not called you already!), extending a hand of cooperation and perhaps discussing broad policy areas where the two of you may be able to forge constructive public policy. Focus on the things you have in common. If you are from the same party or have similar governing philosophies, your task, obviously, is made simpler. However, if your politics are different, look for similarities in your personal lives – families, interests, hobbies (golf, tennis, etc.). Finally, by definition, you have similar professional interests – both of you are interested in protecting your institution while doing what is best for the state.

**Hold Regular Meetings with the Other Leaders.** In some ways, the relationship with your counterpart in the other chamber may be like a marriage with two working spouses. Both of you are so busy with very important responsibilities that there is little time to get together and discuss the day's events. Make time! You should set aside a regular time to meet with the leader of the other chamber. Without such regular meetings, lines of communication may break down and one chamber will not know what the other is doing. Early in the session, you may have little to discuss, but meet anyway. It will establish a relationship and a habit of communication that will be very important later.

**Stand Strong When Necessary.** While cooperation between the two chambers is desirable, it should not be achieved at the expense of one chamber's independent voice. Virtually all legislative bodies are bicameral for a reason. Each chamber represents its own unique membership and constituency. The people are not well served if one chamber sacrifices its independence to the other. Early in the session, you must establish particular baseline principles that you will not compromise. Then, when bills, agendas and schedules are being negotiated, remember those principles and hold to them.

## ❖ Enforce All Ethics Laws and Regulations



*"We have to pay more attention to ethics. The recent paradigm of the widespread focus on ethics by all 50 state legislatures is heartening. This resolve to strengthen our ethical standards will contribute to increased public confidence and trust in our state legislatures. A shift of this nature from the current state of public cynicism to one with more optimism is refreshing and welcomed in this new era of change."*

*The Honorable Bill Stovall, Speaker of the House, Arkansas, 2006-2007*

After months on the campaign trail, it will come as no surprise to you that many people and virtually all of the media bear a marked degree of cynicism for all politicians. You will never be able to eliminate this cynicism entirely—it is an inherent quality of all American citizens to challenge authority. However, you can prevent your members from contributing to this perception by establishing clear rules of appropriate behavior. Make sure your members fully understand your state's ethics and conflict of interest laws and that these laws apply to them and their families.

**Make Sure Everyone Knows the Law.** Every state has laws that regulate ethical behavior by its elected officials. Make sure that every member of your chamber is provided with a copy of the relevant statutes, and include a session on ethics in your pre-session orientation program. You may even find it necessary to establish some supplemental guidelines to cover areas that you do not feel are adequately addressed in the ethics laws, or to clarify some that you feel are ambiguous. In the Maryland Senate, a staff position of "Ethics Czar" was created and that person is required to meet with each member of the Senate individually at least once a year to explain the ethics laws and regulations that apply to legislators. Other states require that members sign a statement indicating they have read and understood the appropriate ethics laws and regulations.

**Model Appropriate Behavior.** As a leader, you are under constant scrutiny from the media, your political foes and a seemingly unending number of special interests. Some of them would like nothing more than to see you make a misstep that puts you in violation of some tenet of ethical behavior. It is critical that you abide by both the spirit and the letter of those laws and guidelines. As any seasoned politician knows, even the appearance of impropriety can be enough to bring down a powerful leader. Make absolutely sure you are thoroughly familiar with your state's ethics statutes. Any failure on your part, real or perceived, could do irreparable damage to your career, your members, and the very legislative institution you have promised to protect.

**Justice Must Be Swift, Fair and Public.** If those who abide by the law see no negative consequences for those who do not, some are likely to find little reason to continue following the rules. Further, ineffective response to violations reinforces the negative public and media attitude discussed above. You must protect your members from unfair attacks, but you must also be willing to initiate necessary internal investigations and respond appropriately and decisively to evidence of ethical violations. This must include a willingness to turn over evidence of wrongdoing to authorities outside of the legislature who are charged with investigation of statutory violation.

## ❖ Equip Your Committees for Success



*"I find it important also to have structured communications among committees. Each week during our legislative session, committee chairs participate in a leadership meeting with me and the Speaker Pro Tem to ensure that they are aware of upcoming issues and areas of debate."*

*The Honorable Seth Hammett, Speaker of the House, Alabama, 1999-present*

It is often said, and rightly so, that committees are the workhorses of the legislature. In some legislatures, as many as ninety percent of the bills that are introduced never get out of committee. Effective bill screening occurs by design, not by accident. It requires strong committee chairs, informed committee members and knowledgeable committee staff. In addition to making committee assignments wisely, there are steps you can take early in the session to insure committee success.

**Provide Training for Committee Leaders and Members.** Even seasoned legislators with previous leadership experience are unlikely to be prepared for the unique challenges of chairing a legislative committee. Make sure that your committee chairs are very familiar with the rules and procedures that govern committee activity. Further, "book learning" needs to be reinforced by practice. Encourage your committee chairs to give their vice-chairs and junior members a chance to wield the gavel during non-controversial meetings or hearings, and include a mock committee meeting or two in orientations to give prospective chairs a feel for the gavel.

**Stand Behind Your Chairs—Literally.** Later we will talk about the need for leaders to "stand behind their chairs" by supporting them when they are challenged by the media, the executive branch or the opposition party. Here, we are referring to literally "standing behind" first-time chairpersons during the early part of their first session. It is critical that you or a knowledgeable staff person or senior legislator be close at hand to provide advice and support to neophyte committee leaders should they find themselves embroiled in an unexpected situation or controversy. According to one leader, "During the first few weeks of session, if we knew something big was coming, my chief or I would be in the committee meeting room to help them, and the members knew not to get tricky."

**Provide Your Committees With Good Staff Support.** Perhaps the best thing you can do for your committee chairs and committee members is to assure that they will have the best support staff that you can provide within your rule and budget constraints. New committee chairs and members will find great security in seasoned staff. Indeed, that staff will hold much of the institutional memory that is lost in committee membership turnover. In this era of tight budgets, when cutbacks in legislative staff are sometimes considered a politically prudent move, reductions in support staff for your committees, particularly for your key committees, can be very short sighted and counter-productive.

## ❖ Develop an Appropriate Role for the Minority Party



*“We have a general history of nonpartisanship, but the group that is coming along today wants to be very partisan. If the Democrats are in control, they should run things. If the Republicans are in control, they should run things and that has created a real problem in our house.”*

*The Honorable Lois DeBerry, Speaker Pro Tempore, Tennessee House of Representatives, 1987-Present*

Even in states with a decisive majority, the minority party wants and is entitled to play a role. The nature of that role and the relationship between the majority and minority party leadership varies from state to state, depending on a variety of factors including scars from earlier electoral battles, who controls the Governor's chair, competing personalities, tradition, and the relative numerical strength of the opposition vis a vis the majority party. Whatever the specific nature of the inter-party relationship in your chamber, it is almost always in your interest to keep the lines of communication open so the opportunity for compromise is always available. Communication can often diffuse a potential partisan battle that only serves to further underscore the legislature's negative image.

**Establish a Regular Dialogue.** Regardless of the size of the minority party caucus in your chamber, you should work to establish a regular dialogue with its leaders, perhaps holding regular meetings to discuss the week's calendar and events. Leaders from several states indicate they hold meetings with the four party leaders from each chamber every Monday before the week's session starts. These meetings allow leaders of the majority to prepare for anything the minority may be planning and enable leaders of the minority to have input into the processes and politics of upcoming sessions. In some states, there are closed circuit telephones at the rostrum and the desks of the Majority and Minority Leaders to permit two or three-way conversations during floor debate.

**Give Them Something.** Life in the minority is seldom fun and life for a Minority Leader can be especially challenging. Unlike leaders of the majority, who control almost everything from bill assignment to parking spots, Minority Leaders have relatively few rewards to distribute to their members. Give them something! Even in legislatures in which the rules provide that the presiding officer appoints minority party members to committees, most presiding officers let the Minority Leaders make committee assignments for their members, or at the least consult with them before making appointments. If this prerogative rests with the presiding officer in your legislature, you may, in the case of key or closely balanced committees, sometimes find it necessary to disregard the Minority Leader's wishes. But this should be the exception, not the regular practice.

**Know When to Say When.** While it is beneficial to empower the minority party, it is just as important to set boundaries for its power. It is important to establish very early in your tenure that you are prepared to restrain the minority party when necessary. If this is not established early, your control over the chamber and of proceedings on the floor may be endangered. The fact is that most legislatures are controlled by the party with the most members – the voters elected more members of the majority party and they expect them to govern.



### **SECTION III: EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR THE LONG HAUL**

Legislative halls are filled with the portraits of leaders who served for only a short time or who served without leaving a legacy for the state or the legislative institution. While one mark of a successful leader is longevity, that is not the only indicator of success nor is it necessarily the most important. Indeed, for leaders in term-limited states, longevity is not an option. We equate a successful tenure as a legislative leader with the leader's success in strengthening the institution of the state legislature, in leaving the body in better shape than it was when he or she assumed office and initiating and passing legislation that improves the lives of the citizens of the state.

## ❖ Protect the Legislative Institution



*“When I became Senate President, I determined to do my best to raise the level of respect for the institution while in a position to do so. That means that, rather than badmouthing the institution and badmouthing each other, I am going to push our members to be as positive as they can and ask for the public's support.”*

*The Honorable Doug White, President of the Senate, Ohio, 2001-2005*

There are so many pressures on you as a legislative leader that at times it is easy to lose sight of the fact that your actions and those of your colleagues reflect also on the institution of the state legislature. You must always be mindful of your responsibility to the legislature. You owe this to yourself, your members, and most importantly, to the people you were elected to serve.

**Maintain Institutional Autonomy.** While it is important to work closely and cooperatively with the other branches of government for the good of the public, this does not mean that you have to give away any of the prerogatives of the legislature. Indeed, an abdication of the lawmaking responsibility to the courts, the bureaucracy, the media, the executive or lobbyists is in the worst interest of the public. As leader, it is your responsibility to make sure the ideas and positions of the legislature are upheld in discussions with others that are trying to influence policy, including the executive branch, the other chamber, lobbyists and the media.

**Respect but also Restrict Legislative Caucuses.** Legislative caucuses are everywhere. Most state legislatures now have gender and ethnic caucuses and many also have caucuses based on ideology, economic interest and geographic regions. While it is understandable and usually appropriate for legislators of like mind to work together on issues of common interest, you must guard against the potential for creating too many centers of power thus fragmenting the overall power of your chamber. To minimize the divisive effects of multiple caucuses, some states do not formally recognize any caucuses except those of the two parties. Others allow the caucuses to form, but only a few provide organizational or financial support to them. Finally, in states where multiple caucuses are recognized and strong, the legislature's top leaders will often try to co-opt the caucuses by bringing their leaders onto the leadership team.

**Rise Above Partisanship.** Leaders of the legislative majority often find themselves having to decide between what is best for their party and what is in the best interest of the state or the institution. These decisions are not easy to make. However, the ultimate responsibility for answering these questions falls to you. After all, making the tough calls is a big part of what being a leader is all about. While you were probably elected to be presiding officer by your caucus, there are times when you must do what is best for your chamber or the legislature, even if it is not necessarily in the best interest of your caucus. For example, while there may be some political advantage to embarrassing a Governor of the other party by holding up the state budget, it may do greater damage to the reputation and stature of the legislature to do so. You must seriously weigh the consequences of such partisan actions on the institution.

## ❖ Build Successful Coalitions



*"I bought two dozen cats over the summer and trained them on the workings of the farm. I did this in preparation for building successful coalitions next session!"*

*The Honorable Bob Stenehjem, Senate Majority Leader, North Dakota, 2003-present*

There are many, many ways to evaluate your success as a legislative leader: how you fare in winning elections for your party, your fundraising prowess, your relations with the executive branch, how the public perceives the job you are doing. However, in the long view of history you will be judged by how effective you were in putting together the votes to make good laws that benefit the people and the state.

**Find Out What Works for Each Member.** The groundwork for building a successful legislative coalition is laid long before you ask for the votes of your colleagues. Taking time to get to know your individual members and their districts will help you better understand their political philosophies and the arguments that might be especially persuasive to them. For some, it may be partisan unity. For others it may be electoral support. For others it may be the cold, hard facts. On most issues, the legislators from your party can be persuaded. It is up to you to find out what it takes to do so.

**Hold Regular Closed Caucus Meetings.** While a few leaders decry the growth of partisan caucuses, most recognize that unified caucuses are necessary to achieve legislative objectives. Caucus meetings allow recalcitrant members to have their say and perhaps see that it is they, and not you, who are standing alone. A well-run caucus also allows the members to air their concerns, strike compromise when compromise is possible, and develop a unified strategy that can be carried to the floor. For these reasons, many leaders hold regular caucus meetings with increasing frequency throughout the session. One cautionary note—if debates or discussions in a closed caucus begin to leak to the press, it can prove difficult for you, personally, and for all members of your caucus.

**Use Both Your Expressed and Implied Powers.** When your members elected you to lead them, they granted you expressed and implied powers. Your expressed powers are generally clearly set forth in the chamber's rules. Your implied powers, however, will vary from leader to leader depending largely on how your members perceive you. To the degree you are seen as an effective, fair, and wise leader, they will defer greater authority to you on critical decisions. Your implied powers will ultimately give you greater authority in leading your members. Using your powers to reward and help others will, in the long run, be far more beneficial to you and the legislature than taking punitive actions such as killing a bill or removing a recalcitrant member from a committee. Magnanimity and praise makes friends, however temporary. Meanness and contempt makes enemies, and they are seldom temporary.

## ❖ Learn from the Success and Failures of Others



*"I constantly consult with other leaders around the country that I have met through SLLF. I have even taken a group of our own caucus members in California to other states (Texas, Florida and Virginia) to learn first hand about best practices in those states. We can improve our policy in California by learning from others and we can do this because of relationships I have built through the SLLF."*

*The Honorable Michael Villines, Republican Leader of the California Assembly, 2007-Present*

Although there are days you may feel alone, as if you were the only person to ever face a particular crisis, be assured that others have walked in your shoes. It is highly unlikely that you or your chamber will face a problem that no one else has ever dealt with. Rather, it is far more likely that other leaders have in the past or are in the present facing similar issues or crises. Take advantage of this knowledge and experience by speaking to your peers in other states or to trusted friends with perhaps more legislative experience than you currently possess.

**Membership Has Its Privileges.** You are part of an exclusive fraternity of state legislative leaders. Take advantage of that membership. Build relationships with fellow leaders in other states who can provide a support network as you tackle issues of politics and policy that many others have faced. Attend national leadership meetings where you can take advantage of opportunities to discuss issues and concerns with men and women who are likely to have faced the very same issues and concerns. There are many worthy organizations that will provide you with just this kind of forum: SLLF, NCSL, CSG, ALEC and the National Speakers Conference, to name a few. When you attend their meetings, you can share your thoughts, concerns and ideas about politics and policy with your peers from across the country and often with experts on a given public policy issue or aspect of leadership.

**Take Advantage of Organizational Support.** There are numerous magazines, newsletters and web pages that offer advice and support for legislative leaders. You can turn to them for assistance on anything from coalition building to media relations to problems of public policy and organizational structure. One senior legislative leader has his staff put together an annual compilation of all of the articles on legislative politics and legislative leadership from popular as well as academic sources. This leader then refers to this compendium on legislative leadership whenever he is searching for ideas regarding policy, politics and organizations.

**Use the Internet.** One of the most powerful sources of information and support for new legislative leaders is the Internet. You and your staff have at your fingertips virtually any type of information you could need from the rules that govern another legislative body to the number and jurisdictions of its committees, to case studies of leaders in action. In addition to the websites of support organizations like SLLF, NCSL, ALEC and CSG, take advantage of the websites of other states to find out how they handle issues of policy, organization and leadership.

## ❖ Protect and Support Your Members



*“Being close to your members is the key to success in this business. I try to keep the members of my caucus fully informed. I don't want them to read something in the paper that they should have heard about from me. So I try to keep them privy to what is going on and what I am planning to do. If you do that, if you let them know and feel that they are part of the process, it makes your job a lot easier. An informed caucus is much better for you as a leader.”*

*The Honorable Emil Jones, Jr., President of the Illinois Senate, 2003–2009*

While legislative leaders are clearly responsible to the voters from their district and the citizens of their state, their most direct constituency is the house or senate members who elected them. It is axiomatic that if you hope to have a long and successful leadership tenure (or at least a successful one, if you are in a term-limited state), you must constantly strive to maintain the support of at least a majority of the members of your caucus. How to do this?

**Give Your Members Opportunities to Lead.** One of the most effective tools for building support among your members is to give them the opportunity to lead and equip them to do so successfully. When you make a legislator a committee chair, let him or her do the job. If you have someone with a particular interest, knowledge or expertise, put him or her on a committee or task force to take advantage of that knowledge or expertise. In addition to building support within your caucus, such efforts increase long-term institutional stability by preparing future leaders, and they may allow you to focus on other issues as these leaders take on issues of importance to them. Another tool that some presiding officers find beneficial is occasionally to turn the gavel over to members and allow them to preside over the chamber.

**Provide Political Cover for Your Members.** If you are the presiding officer then it is likely that there will be many situations where you take the heat for your members. It might be taking a public stance against a popular measure that you know your members believe is flawed but cannot publicly oppose. It might be defending your members when they are attacked by the Governor, the media or a special interest group. And there will be those times when certain members just cannot support a measure no matter how much the party needs them. If the circumstances warrant it, it is up to you as leader to give your members a way to save face in such difficult situations. If there is a very difficult vote that one of your members cannot afford to cast on an issue, it is up to you to make sure you have a strong enough majority on the issue to allow that member to vote his or her conscience or if the rules allow, not vote at all.

**Put Your Members in a Position to Be Re-elected.** You cannot guarantee that all of your members will be re-elected. However, as a leader, you can put your members in the best possible position to win re-election. First, make sure they have legislative successes to point to when they go back to their districts to campaign. In one state, the leader assigned the nine most vulnerable freshmen to carry the most significant pieces of legislation. Each of these vulnerable freshmen could tout a major legislative success on the campaign trail (and all were re-elected). Second, insure that your most vulnerable members also have budgetary items to take back home as well. And, finally, to state the obvious, make sure you raise enough money to assure that all of your members will be able to run effective campaigns.



*"I woke up one morning at 3 am and it hit me that one reason people did not speak up in our caucus is the way we sit. We sit in rows. So I got up early and went in and rearranged the chairs in a circle. I said, we will face each other. And it has made a big difference in facilitating discussion. Now, I know my members share ideas and tell me what is going on."*

*The Honorable Robert D. Garton, President Pro Tempore, Indiana Senate, 1981-2007*

By design, legislatures are highly decentralized bodies. This allows them to take advantage of the varied talents, backgrounds, skills, knowledge and strengths of the membership and achieve multiple tasks at the same time. However, this same institutional strength makes it very difficult for a legislative leader to keep on top of all legislative activities. Yet, if anything goes wrong in this complex process, it is you, as the leader, who will bear the public responsibility. So, you must find a way to keep your finger on the legislative pulse.

**Hold Regular Leadership Meetings.** One very effective way to stay on top of things is to meet regularly with your leadership team. Depending on the organizational and political nature of your institution, that may include your top party leaders, leaders of the other party and committee chairs. No matter which set of leaders you involve, the purpose of these meetings should be to make sure you are aware of all upcoming activities, and particularly of any potential problems or roadblocks. Participants must be encouraged to be open and candid in these meetings so they can tell you what you need to hear, even if it is not what you want to hear.

**Get Out of the Office.** In addition to having leaders come to you, you need to go to them. Take time to walk around the capitol or legislative building and stop by at the offices of members and staff and at committee meeting and hearing rooms. Notes one leader, "The way I stay on top of things is by walking around. I keep an office in the Senate Office Building. I go to committee meetings. I knock on doors. I poke my head in offices." Smart leaders keep their eyes and ears open and put themselves in a position to see and hear what's going on.

**Have an Open Door Policy.** Finally, in order to keep up with what is going on, most leaders have an open door policy to all members of their caucus, if not all members of the legislature. Members need to feel free to come into your office and explain what they are thinking, what they are hearing or what they are about to do. Of course, there are some risks involved in such a policy because it may consume significant amounts of your time on issues that you feel are unimportant or downright silly. While the personal touch is good, modern technology can also increase your accessibility. The use of e-mail, pagers and cell phones can increase your accessibility with little inconvenience.

## ❖ Let Your Committees Work



*"Make your committees work. If you can kill bad legislation at the committee level, it saves time, it is not in the press as long, and it protects your members. Your members have to know that you will protect them politically and you have to be willing to do it."*

*The Honorable Ken Guin, Majority Leader, Alabama House, 1999-Present*

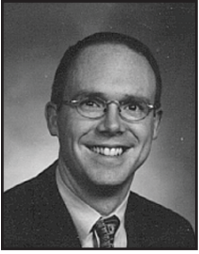
While it is important to remain aware of everything that is going on in your chamber, that does not mean you have to be involved in everything that is going on in your chamber. It is critical that you take advantage of your diverse membership and let your committees do their work. A strong and effective committee system makes session and floor time more efficient and protects your members from politically volatile issues and situations.

**Make Sure Your Committee Chairs Know What is Expected.** It is up to you to give clear directions to your committee chairs regarding the direction you expect them to take. Are they to be very selective in allowing bills to the floor? Are they expected to keep a tight rein on the members or give them freedom? How many bills should they be processing at a given point during the session? They will take their cues from you – make sure those cues are clear.

**Know What Your Committees are Doing.** Keep close tabs on all committees and their chairs. Meet regularly with your committee chairs to get updated on their progress and encourage them to avoid unnecessary procrastination. Use the successes and efficiencies of certain committees to motivate others. Noted one leader, "Each week, staff gave us a list of bills in each committee and we would go around the table and I would ask why one committee had 10 bills and another over a hundred. You sort of put them on the spot."

**Support Your Chairs.** If a committee chair is to be effective, members of the committee as well as all other members of the legislature must know that decisions of the chairperson will be supported by you and other members of leadership. If you consistently find it necessary to overrule decisions by any of your committee chairs, you need to think seriously about replacing those individuals. Such conflicts hurt you, the committee chair, the committee and the entire legislature. If the committee chair is overturned, he or she loses the respect of the members and influence over committee decisions.

**Stand By Committee Recommendations.** For the committee system to make the legislative process more efficient, committee recommendations for the disposal of bills must be taken seriously. While the power of committees to keep legislation bottled up varies from state to state, committees in all state legislatures have the power to make recommendations to the full chamber regarding how it should dispose of a bill. As leader, you should support those recommendations unless you have an extremely compelling reason not to do so.



*"I cannot emphasize enough the importance of keeping yourself healthy. You can never afford to be off your game. You can't afford to be tired. You can't afford to be sick. You can't afford to be run down because everybody and everything depends to large extent on you. On a day when you're off, everything in your chamber is going to be a little bit off. And you don't get that day back."*

*The Honorable Christopher Rants, Speaker of House, Iowa, 2003-2007  
Minority Leader, Iowa House of Representatives, 2007-2009*

As you probably have already come to realize, being a legislative leader is a challenging job – physically, emotionally and mentally. Every day there will be challenges to face, crises to manage and fires to put out. If you are not careful, other parts of your life will suffer – your family, your friendships, your professional life, your health. Take steps to assure that your job will not take over your life.

**Set Aside Time for Yourself.** As important a job as leader is, it is not as important as your own physical and emotional well-being. Make sure you have time to do other things you enjoy. Spend time with friends outside of the legislature. Engage in some passion besides legislative politics – reading, sports, knitting, gardening, hunting – anything that will take you away mentally, if not physically, from the legislative world. One leader we know is an accomplished saxophonist. Another plays a mean game of tennis. Yet another spends hours reading about the Civil War. Find some passion outside of politics to keep you balanced.

**Eat Well And Exercise.** One of the most challenging things for a leader to do is to find time and opportunities to take care of him or herself physically. With all the meetings, hearings, receptions and speeches that fill your regular legislative day, meals often consist of a cup (or ten) of coffee, a Snickers bar and a Coke, or fast food gulped between conversations with lobbyists and colleagues. Eat well, even if that means turning down some events or taking your lunch in a brown paper sack. Along the same lines, set aside some time to exercise – even a few sit-ups in the morning can make a difference. Find others who enjoy the same type of exercise you do (racquetball, basketball, tennis, jogging, etc.) and set up a regular schedule. Who knows, you might actually solve some political differences on the court.

**Take Time to Have Fun.** Psychologists, physicians and our mothers tell us that laughter is good for all, even if we are legislative leaders. While you must take your job seriously, that doesn't mean you always have to take yourself seriously. You will make mistakes- fix them if you can, laugh at them, and then go on. There will be days when you can't decide whether to laugh or cry or scream. Choose laughter. There is humor all around you. (Have you ever really looked at some of your colleagues?) Take time to find it and enjoy it. It will make you a better person and a better leader.

## ❖ Make the Legislature Proactive



*“The legislature has lost the ability to proactively be the policy leader. That has gone more to the executive branch. We need to figure out how to reassert the policy initiating role of the legislature. . . . We tend to waste our most precious resources, time and the experience of our members, by focusing on a lot of dribble.”*

*The Honorable Richard Bennett, President, Maine Senate, 2001-2003*

Like most institutions, it is easy for the legislature to get caught up in tedium and minutia to the detriment of more important and significant activities. The legislature can spend its time doing many things: reacting to the media, to the executive or to the latest "crisis," fighting bitter partisan battles that seldom solve problems and damage the reputation of the institution, trying to solve minor (that may seem major) constituent problems, or proactively addressing public policy problems that have or will afflict their state. It is up to you to try and shift the focus of the chamber from the former to the latter - make the legislature the proactive policy initiating body it was designed to be by the founders.

**Develop a Caucus (or Legislative) Agenda.** In order to promote a proactive policy agenda, you have to have an agenda! Work with the members of your caucus (or both parties if possible) to develop an agenda of issues that you can agree need to be addressed and then develop specific policy proposals to address them. The need to build a solid consensus may mean you have to avoid or ignore some contentious issues, even if they are issues you would like to address. Don't force a contentious issue at the expense of the entire agenda and don't move forward unless you are confident of caucus support. It may be necessary and appropriate to hold an off-site retreat to determine these issues.

**Organize Your Caucus To Develop Solutions.** It is difficult for a legislative caucus to develop proactive legislative agendas unless there is a conscious effort to do so. If you are able to develop a bipartisan agenda, then charge your committee chairs to use the committees as proactive initiators. If, as is more likely, your agendas will be partisan in nature, organize your caucus around working groups, each charged to develop policy proposals. In Ohio, a former Speaker divided his caucus into ten work groups, each charged to look at a particular area of policy deemed important by the caucus. The working groups then brought specific proposals to the caucus for consideration.

**Take Advantage of External Experts.** In developing your agenda, don't be afraid to educate and inform your members. In developing economic proposals, bring in financial advisors or economic experts from academia. When examining education challenges, expose your members to various perspectives from the field as well as the public policy experts. In the case of the Ohio legislature noted above, the Republican caucus held a series of one-day workshops for all members of the caucus relative to each of the identified policy areas, bringing in experts from across the state from all political and ideological perspectives to educate and inform the members.

## ❖ A Word to Minority Leaders

*"The role of the Minority Party is very important in the legislative process and in the marketplace of ideas. Much of the work of the minority party is to offer alternative solutions to the policy debate. It is important to offer a contrasting point of view to sharpen the debate throughout your state. Used effectively, the minority party can create a broader discussion in the public and achieve positive policy outcomes. A vigorous minority party can always make a difference."*

*The Honorable Michael Villines  
Republican Leader of the California Assembly, 2007-Present*

The role and influence of a Minority Leader varies greatly from state to state and is dependent upon the size of the minority party caucus and the traditions and practices of the legislature. When the majority party's margin of control is only a few votes, the Minority Leader can wield a great amount of influence every time there are a handful of defections in the majority caucus. When the majority party has a sizable numbers advantage, the Minority Leader's role will be much different and probably less influential. If you are the Minority Leader and the Governor is from your party, you will be expected to be the Governor's spokesperson in your chamber and, if you have the necessary threshold of members in your caucus, to also assure a veto-proof chamber. If the Governor is from the majority party, your responsibility will be to serve as an articulate spokesperson for the loyal opposition, effectively utilizing whatever influence you can muster to shape and modify the majority's legislative program. Whatever your specific role and responsibility, there are number of things that you can both keep in mind and do that will help you to be successful in the difficult, demanding and sometimes thankless job of Minority Leader.

**Do Not Assume That Because You Are In The Minority You Cannot Influence What Happens In Your Chamber.** You will not control the agenda. You will not have a large number of appointments to make. And you have a smaller office budget than the Majority Leader. But you will still have opportunities to influence what happens in your chamber. In a state with a close majority, it is not at all unusual for the majority leadership to work closely with the Minority Leader to pass legislation, especially when his or her caucus is divided. In one state, the Minority Leader was able to deliver the votes to end a two-month stalemate and secure passage of a new state income tax. On other occasions, majority leadership has turned to leaders of the minority to build a coalition to pass the state budget. Opportunities such as these do not present themselves with regularity, but they do arise periodically, and you must be prepared to act forcefully and decisively if and when they do.

**Remember, You Are the Unquestioned Leader of Your Party in Your Chamber.** Unlike the Majority Leader who, in most cases, must share or, more likely, serve as the second in command to the presiding officer as the head of his or her party in the chamber, you as Minority Leader are the unquestioned leader of the minority party. Should your party win a majority in the next election, you will almost certainly occupy the acknowledged top position in the chamber. As the sole and unquestioned leader of your party, there will be no question in the press room about who to seek out for a statement on your party's position on legislation. All of this places you in a position of high visibility and also means that there is no one to cover for you in the event of a misstatement.

**Create A Record on Which to Run in The Next Election.** One of your primary responsibilities as Minority Leader is to create a positive record of input into legislation and offer constructive and attractive alternatives to majority party proposals. These proposals, in turn, can be used by members of the caucus and challenging candidates to their benefits in the next election. In a competitive two-party state, you will undertake this responsibility with the ultimate goal of turning your minority into the next majority. In states where winning a majority is unrealistic, your goal should be to increase the size of your caucus to a level that will force the majority party to pay more attention to your alternative proposals and, if the Governor is from your party, to make the chamber veto-proof.

**Utilize All Resources at Your Disposal to Develop and Publicize Your Proposals.** Employ the very best and brightest as your personal staff assistants and avoid as much as possible the hiring of political patronage appointees who will not be able to make positive contributions to your caucus. Utilizing your legislature's nonpartisan professional staff can prove invaluable in gathering and compiling information for the development of policy alternatives. Have your staff prepare white papers with executive summaries of your proposals and then hold press conferences to officially release them (the summaries can be particularly helpful to television reporters in putting together their always brief reports). Just prior to your press conference, give a copy of the white paper to the Majority Leader and request an opportunity to meet to discuss it. If your minority office budget allows you to employ media relations staff, they will be able to help you to schedule your press conferences to achieve maximum exposure.

**Your Best Opportunity to Influence Legislation Is Probably In Committee.** The details of almost every important piece of legislation are crafted in committee. The more relaxed informal and usually less partisan discussion of a committee meeting differs markedly from the partisan and often-heated debate on the floor. Therefore, the opportunity for a minority party member to capture the ear of majority members and have meaningful input into the content of bills is generally greater in committee than in the more formal floor sessions where the majority party may have a hardened caucus position and will be concerned about appearing firm, decisive and in control. Impress upon your members that, if they take their committee assignments seriously, they may find themselves presented with opportunities for meaningful input on a number of bills. As Minority Leader, give the same thought and consideration to your committee appointments (or to your recommendations to the presiding officer if he or she is empowered to make minority appointments) as you would if you were Majority Leader. And pay particular attention to whom you designate as your ranking minority member on each committee because this individual will be your party's public spokesperson concerning committee actions and the likely chair of the committee should you move into the majority.

**Plan Your Campaign To Become the Majority or to Increase Your Numbers In the Next Election.** Utilize your entire tenure as Minority Leader to prepare for the next campaign and your efforts to win a majority or increase the size of your caucus. In addition to creating a record on which your members and challengers can run, provide your members with visibility by including them as participants in your press conferences, issuing press releases to their local media praising them for their efforts and accomplishments, and giving them assignments that will enable them to build a

personal record on which to seek reelection. In doing so, pay particular attention to those members who are in the most competitive districts and seem most vulnerable. Early on identify those majority party members who also appear most vulnerable and work with your local party people in those districts to line up attractive candidates to challenge them in the next election. Then make sure that all of your candidates, particularly your most vulnerable incumbents and your challengers to vulnerable majority incumbents, are provided with the professional advice and campaign financial support that they need to achieve victory.

**Resist the Temptation to be Overly Negative.** If a Minority Leader is to be successful in turning his or her minority into the majority, or in simply increasing the minority party's representation in the legislature, it is necessary to be critical of the record and actions of the majority. It is always tempting for a Minority Leader to focus almost exclusively on leveling harsh criticism at the majority party's program and actions because reporters are often attracted to such attacks and they can therefore generate a considerable amount of media coverage. Drawing comparisons between majority actions and minority alternatives that cast the majority in a negative light are necessary to democracy. But resorting to cheap demagoguery is not. The latter serves to destroy public confidence in the legislature and the legislative process. And it certainly will prove counterproductive with the majority leadership if you are serious, as you should be, about trying to have influence over legislation passed by your chamber. Even if such an approach should somehow propel your minority into the majority in the next election, your victory can prove a hollow one. You may well find yourself inheriting a less credible institution, and you will have invited the former majority party to take the same destructive approach in its new role as the minority.

## ❖ Conclusion: Leave Your Mark

*"We all take these jobs and we can be caretakers or we can actually do something. It can be painful. Your friends beat you up and sometimes the groups that got you there expect you to compromise and want things from you. But at the end of the day, you have to stay focused on the big picture so when you walk away from your job, you feel like you did something of value."*

The Honorable Robert M. Hertzberg  
Speaker of the California Assembly, 2000-2002

**H**orace Mann, the great nineteenth century scholar, author, educator and one time President of the Massachusetts Senate told an audience at Antioch College to "be ashamed to die unless you have won some victory for humanity." Although we are not talking life and death here (political death does not count), we believe, in a similar vein, that it is a shame for any legislative leader to conclude his or her tenure without leaving the legislative institution and the state better than he or she found it. He or she should pass policy to improve the lives and stations of the people in his or her state. He or she should lead in such a way as to make the institution a more effective and more efficient lawmaking institution.

We hope that this guide will, at least in some small way, help you to achieve that noble objective. Reaching that goal-strengthening the legislative institution-requires that you remain focused on it from the time you know you will be the leader through the end of your leadership tenure. You must establish this objective early. Always view it as the brass ring, reaching, striving and working for it every day. Try to anticipate and prepare for public policy challenges rather than react to them. Be prepared to lead public opinion rather than follow it. Of course, you will have to halt your quest for a legacy periodically to deal with administrative duties, respond to emergencies and put out fires. But never lose sight of your ultimate objective: to have a positive impact on the legislative institution in which you serve and in the lives of the constituents that elected you and your colleagues.



## Appendix: Resources Provided by SLLF

In order to assist you with the various and numerous challenges that you face as a legislative leader, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation has developed a series of publications, presentations and case studies available on our website ([www.sllf.org](http://www.sllf.org)) or by mail (contact us at 508-771-3821).

### **Publications**

*GAVEL* is the quarterly newsletter of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation. Each volume presents information on innovative activities of leaders across the country, as well as profiles of various legislative leaders and reviews of new books on leadership. These articles will show you how other leaders have addressed many of the problems that you are facing or will be facing in the future. *GAVEL* also features information about the educational programs and activities of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation and its international subsidiaries, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation/Europe and the State Legislative Leaders Foundation/Latin America.

*Speaker to Speaker* is the newsletter of the National Speakers Conference, the organization that serves the needs and interests of officers who preside over America's State Houses and Assemblies. *Speaker to Speaker* regularly features profiles of new and established Speakers, as well as stories on the interesting and innovative activities taking place in their offices. While the newsletter focuses on the activities of state house Speakers, the lessons are applicable to all legislative institutions. Also included are articles about honors and accolades received by Speakers for their works.

*Leadership and the Media* is a brief document (6 pages) offering specific tips on how to understand and work effectively with the media. It provides leaders specific and practical steps for working with the press and building a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with them. The publication also suggests tips that you may offer your members as they develop their own media skills. The publication concludes with the "Six Core Concepts for Successful Media Relations" that will enable you to create a "win-win" situation. It will be particularly useful to leaders, but will also be useful to your members. It was developed by SLLF with Marty Linsky, a former legislative leader, journalist, advisor to former Massachusetts Governor William Weld and Lecturer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

*Working with the Media (A Handbook for State Legislators)* is a comprehensive and detailed discussion of the keys to developing a positive working relationship with the media. It provides a blueprint for working with the media that is of great value to legislative leaders for their own use and as an orientation and training tool for their new members. Further, it can serve as a guide for any legislator who is encountering difficulties in working with the media. The publication offers some basic principles of the relationship between the legislature and the media and then offers more than a dozen specific suggestions for building an effective working relationship with members of the media.

*Legislative Committees: A Legislative Body's Most Important Institutional Mechanism*, prepared initially for the 2nd International Conference On Strengthening Legislatures In Response To Globalization and International Security Issues, offers insight into the importance and qualities of a strong and effective legislative committee system. One of the most important functions performed by legislative leaders in most chambers is the oversight of legislative committees. Indeed, perhaps no body or institution is more important to a successful legislature than an effective committee system. In addition to a discussion of the importance of a strong committee system, the publication includes "The Seven Key Elements of an Effective Legislative Committee System" and tips on how to achieve them. These suggestions will be of great value as you establish standing committees, appoint committee members and assign committee chairs.

### **Presentations**

*Ruling the Media* is a humorous and entertaining PowerPoint Presentation offering leaders useful tips on how to neutralize the aggressive media. Specifically, it focuses on rules for making sure your message gets out rather than that of the journalist. The presentation was developed by Nick Nichols of Nichols-Dezenhal Communications Management Group for an SLLF educational program on media relations. It includes "3 Golden Rules of Media Relations" and "10 Tips for Successful Interviews." In addition to helping you work with the media, it could be very useful to your members (especially those inexperienced with the media limelight).

*Technology ToolBox for Legislative Leaders* was developed for Leadership at Your Fingertips: Legislative Politics in the Information Age, an educational program for state legislative leaders. This CD includes presentations and articles on various leadership responsibilities and technological tools that can be used to address them. Topics include tips for the effective use by leaders of e-mail, video-conferencing technology, media streaming, direct marketing, the Internet and web sites. The CD also includes sessions on how to use technology to better meet traditional leadership responsibilities like communicating with your members, running an efficient chamber, coordinating effective caucus campaigns, building a base of public support and competing effectively with the executive. If you would like a copy of this CD, please call Marcia VanderVoort at (800) 532-3375.

### **Case Studies**

Over the years, SLLF has developed numerous case studies, examining how leaders effectively responded to particular problems in their states. All of these case studies are available at [http://www.sllf.org/leadersfoundation.php/cat/36/aid/55/title/Case\\_Studies](http://www.sllf.org/leadersfoundation.php/cat/36/aid/55/title/Case_Studies).

#### ***Leading the Colorado General Assembly, 2005: The Perfect Storm***

When Andrew Romanoff, a young political science professor with four years experience in the House, brought the Colorado House to order on January 12, 2005, it was the culmination of a remarkable journey. He led the Democrats to their first majority in the Colorado House in more than thirty years, bringing with him more than a dozen freshman and no Democrat with experience in the majority. Further, this inexperienced leader with an inexperienced caucus took over at a time when Colorado faced a significant fiscal crisis. Because of initiative mandated spending and

TABOR (Taxpayers Bill of Rights) mandated tax rebates, the Centennial state faced a growing budget deficit. To make matters worse, Romanoff and the House Democrats faced a hungry Republican House Minority, a tenacious Democratic Senate President with a one-seat majority and a popular, experienced Republican governor with his eye on higher office. The stage was set for failure, but Romanoff successfully addressed the crisis and reformed TABOR and the budget process. Further, his caucus was rewarded for their efforts with an expanded majority in 2006 and 2008 and Romanoff was recognized as one of America's most effective legislators.

### ***Building a Consensus for Health Care Reform in Massachusetts: Policymakers and the “Hero Opportunity” in the Bay State***

In 2005, leaders in Massachusetts found themselves facing a crisis in healthcare. Unless significant changes were made in the way Massachusetts allocated its federal aid, the state would lose more than \$750 million in aid. However, and not surprisingly, such a reallocation faced stiff opposition from some stakeholders and skepticism from the rest. House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi, Senate President Robert Travaglini and Governor Mitt Romney chose, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, to use this crisis to do more than just fix the immediate problem. Working with all of the stakeholders, they put together a program that completely altered the landscape for health care in Massachusetts and set the state up as an example (for good and bad) to the rest of the country. Each representing distinct and separate stakeholders, DiMasi, Travaglini and Romney put together a coalition that gave everyone something, but gave no one everything and in so doing rose to "the hero's opportunity."

### ***Effective Leadership in the Face of Legislative Term Limits: Larry Householder's Legislative Team***

Larry Householder was just completing his first term as a member of the Ohio House when he decided to run for Speaker. During his second term, he was narrowly elected to the six-man leadership team on the bottom rung of the leadership ladder. He used this position and the realization that term limits would create a large incoming class after the 2000 election to build a coalition that would catapult him to the Speaker's office. He used the large incoming class to his advantage, building a loyal team that was not only able to help him become Speaker, but, against all odds and projections, produced one of the most productive and effective legislative sessions in recent memory. Look at this case study to learn how you can turn a largely inexperienced body of neophytes into a well-oiled legislative machine that can compete effectively with an experienced Senate and Governor. Householder achieved this by building an esprit de corps among the legislators in his caucus, engendering a high level of loyalty from the legislators, providing legislators an opportunity to contribute, and putting them in a position to win in terms of politics and policy.

### ***Learning to Lead: Climbing the Learning Curve with Gibson D. (Gib) Lewis***

When Gib Lewis was first elected Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives he seemed well positioned and qualified for the post. He had served as a Committee Chair for eight years and was one of a dozen or so members in the previous Speaker's "inner circle." And yet the first months of his tenure were marred by a series of often self-inflicted crises and personal setbacks. He made mistakes in dealing with the press and was forced to admit some errors in his financial reports. He

had underestimated the amount of time necessary to administer the House, including referring bills, meeting with members and lobbyists, answering mail and meeting the needs of the members. He also found it difficult to provide strong and decisive policy leadership in the chamber in the face of a new and aggressive governor. Despite these difficult beginnings, Lewis would serve ten years as Speaker and make the position his own. This case study tells the story of the transition from overwhelmed freshman leader to seasoned veteran. Read the case to understand how a new leader can overcome and learn from his or her mistakes to become a successful leader.

### ***Managing in a Crisis: Dee Long's Tumultuous Year***

Speaker Dee Long seemed to have everything going for her when she was elected to be the first woman in history to serve as the Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives. She had earned good reviews for her leadership of the challenging and important House Tax Committee, was elected Speaker by an overwhelming margin, and was held in high regard by the state's media. The St. Paul Pioneer Press described her as "Blunt. Strong. Impatient. Brassy. Pragmatic." Before the end of her first term, Long would be forced to resign from the post for which she seemed so well fit following her perceived mistakes in responding to an ethics lapse by one of her members. She had no ethical lapses herself, but failed to respond effectively (according to the press) to lapses by her members. As the crisis grew, her relationships with the media as well as some of the senior members of her caucus deteriorated to the point where few were left to defend her when she decided to step down. What could she have done differently to prevent a minor scandal from ending such a promising legislative career? This case study will help focus on the things a leader should and should not do when a scandal or crisis erupts in his or her chamber.

### ***Making the Most of What You Have: The Minority Party Leadership of Senators Harry Meshel (Ohio) and Ben Atchley (Tennessee)***

Leading a legislative minority is potentially one of the most thankless and least rewarding political jobs around. Minority leaders seldom have the means to significantly influence policy and often don't possess the tools to keep their own members in line. They are caught between a desire to maintain the party's philosophy in the face of defeat or compromise that philosophy to achieve some small amount of influence. Ben Atchley and Harry Meshel were in such positions. Apart from holding the same leadership post of Senate Minority Leader, Senator Harry Meshel and Senator Ben Atchley had little in common. One was a Democrat, the other a Republican. One was a rural legislator in a Southern state, the other grew up in a tough urban ethnic neighborhood in the Midwest. One was a consensus builder, the other an aggressive street fighter. And yet, each worked to make the most of the tools and opportunities given him as the leader of the "loyal opposition," within the political context of the state and institution that he worked, influencing politics and policy within his state. This case study explores how the job of Minority Leader is as much a function of personality, context and opportunity as it is raw power. Minority Leaders will recognize many of the challenges faced by Senators Meshel and Atchley and leaders on the other side of the aisle will gain insight into how their opposition does or does not work.

## *Leading in Divided Government: Speakers Michael Busch and William Howell Learn to Deal with Governors of the Other Party*

As the number of Republicans and Democrats becomes more evenly balanced in states across the country, a growing number of new leaders find themselves facing a governor of the other party. In 2005, this is the case in more than half the states. This situation means that leaders of the majority party must find a balance, addressing the needs of the state without "selling out" to the governor. Likewise, leaders of the minority party (party of the governor) must find the balance between representing the governor and protecting the autonomy of the legislative body. This case study explores the experiences of two first term Speakers (Michael E. Busch of Maryland and William J. Howell of Virginia) as they try to find their footing in the inevitable battles with governors of the other party. Busch, who became Speaker after the eight-year incumbent lost his seat, battled new Republican Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. over taxes, budget cuts and education. In Virginia, Howell rose to the position of Speaker when his predecessor resigned following a scandal. He challenged Democrat Mark Warner on taxes, the budget, abortion and a constitutional amendment to allow the governor to seek re-election. The case study explores how the two fared in their efforts to work with (or against) the governor.

### *Michigan's Fiscal Crisis Part I: Trying to Derail an Aggressive Governor*

Perhaps nothing is more difficult for a legislative leader than to lead his or her chamber through a recession. Because almost all states require a balanced budget, hard times mean hard decisions. Cuts have to be made. The challenges are even more daunting when the partisan politics of a divided government are tossed into the equation. This is exactly the position in which first term Speaker Lewis Dodak found himself in Michigan in January 1991 when he brought the newly elected Democratic majority to order. In the Governor's office, he faced a new governor and twenty-year legislator John Engler who set out an aggressive partisan agenda in his first inaugural address. This case study (Part A) examines the importance of personality and experience in the art of negotiation and conflict as the new Speaker and the new Governor feel each other out. What can we learn from Speaker Dodak's initial efforts to derail the aggressive governor's plan to reframe the debate and restructure state government?

### *Michigan Fiscal Crisis Part II: Protracted Warfare*

Early in the administration of a new leader, everyone is busy trying to determine what that leader will do, and if he or she is focused on trying to determine what other players are going to do. The first months are like the first rounds of a boxing match - a few jabs, a few wild roundhouse punches, but mostly dancing around to see what the other guy will do. Part II of the Michigan case picks up eight months into the administration of Governor John Engler. By now, there are no surprises. The Republican governor is going to be aggressive in pursuing his agenda and the Democratic Speaker is trying to find an effective response. He tries compromise. He tries court action. He tries forcing the governor to the table. He tries confrontation. He leads the Democrats to develop and offer an alternative agenda and alternative vision for the future of the state. And yet, stalemate remained a central feature of the relationship.

### *Michigan Fiscal Crisis Part III: The Political Consequences of Policy Decisions*

Decisions made and actions taken by a legislative leader do not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, every decision or action, no matter how significant or insignificant for the state, may have political ramifications for the legislative leader or the members of his or her caucus. This may be even more true for economic and taxation decisions than for anything else. As budget difficulties and stalemate continues, legislative leaders must judge whether their party is better served by continuing to challenge the executive on the budget or by acquiescing to his or her policies, anticipating a voter backlash against the executive that will benefit the opposition party. The final part of the Michigan case study more directly explores the electoral and political ramifications of leadership decisions. Who will win? Who will lose? Will the decisions of the Speaker cost him the majority or gain additional seats for his caucus?