

# FOUR LEADERS ON HARLEYS, HUMOR



**REPRESENTATIVE  
MICHAEL BUSCH**  
Maryland Speaker of the House

**State Legislatures:** In working on the budget, what was your top priority?

**Maryland Speaker Michael Busch:** In Maryland, we have had to cut services and raise taxes to balance the budget

and protect education funding—our top priority. This year, we focused on addressing the state’s structural deficit, ensuring the long-term viability of the retiree benefit system and funding education programs to ensure a strong future for the state’s knowledge-based economy. As a result of our work, the state’s structural deficit has been reduced by more than 42 percent. Maryland now has over \$730 million in cash reserves, including the rainy day fund. We eliminated over \$6.5 billion in long-term retiree health care liability over the next 10 years and fully funded education programs.

**SL:** Has the influx of new members to your chamber made your job easier or more difficult?

**Busch:** In 2010, Democrats lost six delegates. While this may not seem like a significant shift, the House Democratic Caucus is made up of a wide spectrum of views, from very conservative to very progressive. This made some social issues more difficult to pass out of the House during the first year of this four-year term.

**SL:** How do you work with the other party?

**Busch:** I have respect for the minority leader and the job that he has to do. We meet weekly during the legislative session. I think we have had the benefit of not taking political arguments too personally, so we are able to work together on a number of policy areas without the same level of acrimony seen at the national level. Often, through debate with our own party and the other party, legislation is strengthened, for a better end product.

**SL:** How do you think members in your party would describe you? And the other party?

**Busch:** I would hope members of both parties would describe me as fair. I work hard to ensure that every member has a say on an issue—whether in formal debate on the House floor, in committee or in caucus meetings. The majority of our work, contrary to the current public view based on media reports, is nonpartisan. We very often find common ground on legislation. We were all elected to serve the people of our communities and of our state, and I believe it is a responsibility we all take seriously.

**SL:** In your spare time, what do you read, what are your hobbies?

**Busch:** I enjoy coaching my daughters’ recreational basketball and lacrosse teams. I’m able to unplug from political life and interact with moms and dads in the community who also enjoy time with their kids. I also read biographies, primarily about American history and sports history. Both can be very informative to my role as speaker. I am currently reading “Washington: A Life,” by Ron Chernow.

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**REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT GILLIGAN**  
Delaware Speaker of the House

**State Legislatures:** What was your top budget priority this year?

**Delaware Speaker Robert Gilligan:** After trimming several “nice to have” expenditures the past few years, we knew we were facing some serious decisions about our budget. The biggest decision we made was to reform our pension and health-care systems. Pensions for newly hired state workers were overhauled and our health-care plans were revised, saving taxpayers more than \$500 million during the next 15 years and solidifying our financial future.

**SL:** Have new members made your job easier or more difficult?

**Gilligan:** The Delaware House has seen a steady rotation of new members into the 41-member chamber the last few election cycles. Losing members with institutional knowledge always

hurts, but the energy many newcomers bring has helped us tremendously. Several of our newer members bring different perspectives to the chamber—small-business owners, health-care professionals, educators, law enforcement officers and trade workers.

**SL:** What’s been your approach to working with the other party? Has it worked?

**Gilligan:** In Delaware, we have always prided ourselves on our ability to work together to solve our problems and address the issues facing our state. In the House, we have committed to an open process with legislation, allowing both parties to voice their concerns and offer suggestions so we produce the best possible legislation. It has resulted in us passing balanced budgets well before our deadlines and passing the vast majority of our legislation with broad bipartisan support.

**SL:** What advice would you give to the next leader?

**Gilligan:** Be well-organized. Be prepared to spend

the time necessary to do the job. Always be aware that at times the unexpected will happen. Relax and enjoy the opportunity to be speaker. In my case, I waited 36 years to be speaker. If you’re not going to enjoy the job or put the time into it, don’t do it. If you don’t like making tough decisions, don’t sit in the speaker’s chair.

**SL:** What would you be doing if you weren’t in the legislature?

**Gilligan:** For me, being speaker is a full-time responsibility and leaves very little time for other pursuits. If I weren’t in the legislature, I would have more time to spend with my family. My younger daughter lives on the Big Island of Hawaii, and I would like to spend more time there. I like to be warm during the winter.



## AND HOBBIES

*“The collective talent in the new class actually made the transition easier and the learning curve flatter than expected, much to my delight. They are an impressive class and great to work with.”*



**REPRESENTATIVE  
MIKE O'NEAL**  
Kansas House Speaker



**SENATOR  
JACK KIBBIE**  
Iowa Senate  
President

**State Legislatures:**  
What was your top budget priority this year?

**Iowa Senate President Jack Kibbie:** I tried to make the case for our community colleges. While not entirely successful, I kept it as my No. 1 priority and was able to fend off deeper cuts than were originally proposed.

**SL:** Have new members made your job easier or more difficult?

**Kibbie:** In the last election, six new Republicans were elected to the Iowa Senate. Only one had previous legislative experience, and none of the others had served in any elective office before. Like many new legislators across the country, they rode the anti-incumbency, anti-government wave into office. They all carried a strong ideology focused on cutting spending and were averse to compromise, making it very difficult to find common ground.

**SL:** Were you surprised by the challenges you faced this year?

**Kibbie:** I think all of us who are Democrats could see where most of the energy was in the 2010 election cycle. We were prepared for losses, but I am not sure we realized just how well our opponents would turn out voters and how depressed our own turnout would be. In session, once we saw the new members in action, we realized this new group was very different from previous members. We were surprised at how deep their feelings were against government and compromise.

**SL:** How do you facilitate working with the other party?

**Kibbie:** As president of the Senate, I am elected by my Democratic colleagues. However, as the presiding officer, I firmly believe I must be fair and impartial in my rulings. One of the best ways to have chaos in a chamber is to not give the minority an opportunity to be part of the process. I also let all members, particularly the minority, know that my office is always open to them. They are welcome to come to me with any concerns about the administration of the Senate. I would like to think that our minority members would say I have done my best to give them a fair shake. One thing you can't buy is integrity. That has to be earned, and I have done my best not to abuse the privilege of my office.

**SL:** What are you doing to promote a respect for and participation in our democracy?

**Kibbie:** I am always amazed at the public's lack of knowledge of the legislative process. I view part of my job to be helping them understand how their government works and what they can do to make their voices and opinions heard. I participate in a lot of town meetings and respond to a large number of constituent concerns. I not only try to explain the system, but also encourage voters and young people approaching voting age to consider the importance of not getting locked in to one point of view. They need many sources of opinion to make an informed choice on what is the best policy to solve the hard problems state governments face. The enemy of a vibrant democracy is rigid ideology. I think elected officials bear an important responsibility to educate and inform voters that finding answers is not as simple as they may think.

**State Legislatures:** In working on the budget, what was your top priority?

**Kansas Speaker Mike O'Neal:** Facing a \$500 million-plus deficit going into the 2011 session, my main goal was to bring spending in line with revenues and end the session with a healthy balance. Another top priority was to end the cycle of politically motivated spending amendments that have bogged down the budget process in the past. I was successful in getting a “pay-go” House rule passed that kept the budget debate focused on our true budget priorities and the bottom line.

**SL:** What will be the greatest challenge facing you in 2012?

**O'Neal:** Continuing to bring spending in line with revenues, particularly as federal funding diminishes. Turning the recession lemon into tax reform and job growth lemonade. And, finally, coming to grips with our unfunded public retirement system liability.

**SL:** Have new members in your chamber made your job easier or more difficult?

**O'Neal:** The 2010 elections brought 33 new members to my Republican caucus alone and, while this would normally be a very challenging scenario, the collective talent in the new class actually made the transition easier and the learning curve flatter than expected, much to my delight. They are an impressive class and great to work with.

**SL:** What's the greatest asset you bring to the job?

**O'Neal:** Communication and negotiation skills developed during 30-plus years of practicing law, but probably more important, a sense of humor, optimism and passion for Kansas that are, hopefully, infectious.

**SL:** What would you be doing if you weren't in the Legislature?

**O'Neal:** Getting two new Lab puppies, visiting our kids, exploring the lakes and back roads of Kansas on my Harley with my wife, and working on public policy initiatives for Kansas in some capacity.