

Four leaders on challenges, priorities

SENATOR BRENT HILL

Idaho Senate President Pro Tem

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

IDAHO SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEM BRENT

HILL: Of our 35 state senators, six of them are new this year. Part of my job is to help them be successful in their new positions and to motivate the more experienced legislators to help in the process. Our members were anxious to help and worked very well with the new senators from both political parties.



SL: Describe your challenges this year.

HILL: By anyone's standard, 2011 was one of the most difficult sessions the Idaho Legislature has ever faced. In addition to facing the worst economic crisis in our lifetimes and enacting major reforms in public education, we dealt with some of the most emotional issues that confront state lawmakers.

Within a six-week period, we tackled abortion, assisted suicide, state nullification of federal laws, constitutional conventions, guns on college campuses, and the management of wolves. It is unusual to address more than one or two of these highly emotional issues during one legislative session, but we met them all head-on.

SL: What was your top budget priority?

HILL: Public education is the largest portion of the state budget and is always our top priority. We are facing very difficult economic times and a strong resistance to increasing taxes. Although the Legislature had amassed significant rainy-day accounts to help public education in the event of an economic downturn, our preparations were insufficient to see us through a recession this deep and this long. We made aggressive cuts in almost all state agencies and programs trying to protect public education as long as possible, but even our top priority suffered.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

HILL: Idaho is one of the most Republican states in the country, and our Democrats can some-

times feel excluded from the political process. I have tried to allow our Democrats to fully participate in the presentation and discussion of the issues facing the legislature. I meet with the minority leadership often, listen to their concerns, and keep them apprised of upcoming matters. They are our friends and colleagues and we always try to treat them with respect.

SL: What are you doing to promote citizen respect for the Legislature?

HILL: When I became the Senate president pro tem this year, one of my primary goals was to restore the public's confidence in government. Political scandals, corruption, bickering and partisanship have eroded the trust people have in their leaders. I have tried to communicate more openly within the walls of the Capitol and throughout the state. Working relationships between the House and the Senate are better than they have been for years, and both bodies are working with the governor to accomplish the people's business. Our ability to get things done has not gone unnoticed by the citizens, and they see very little bickering and finger-pointing coming from the lawmakers.

REPRESENTATIVE GREG STUMBO

Kentucky Speaker of the House

SL: In working on the budget, what was your top priority?



KENTUCKY HOUSE SPEAKER

GREG STUMBO: I had two priorities: Keep our classroom funding from being cut and get thousands of Kentuckians back to work as part of a jobs-creation pack-

age that would have rebuilt our oldest schools and improved our overall infrastructure. We accomplished the first, but unfortunately saw the second stopped in the Senate.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

STUMBO: The House leaders from both parties have a great working relationship, and any major decision has significant input from the minority leaders at every step of the way. I have also known my counterpart in the Senate,

a Republican, for nearly 30 years, and that has made it easier to work together as well.

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

STUMBO: I think my experience in the Capitol—more than 20 years as a House leader and four as attorney general—has given me a much deeper knowledge of the challenges Kentucky faces. I have a better idea of what can and cannot be done politically. Additionally, I have formed a strong network of friends, making it easier to build the coalitions needed to get things done.

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

STUMBO: I learned early on that those who think they know it all don't tend to last long in politics. I'd encourage the next leader to cultivate diverse sources of information. Don't dismiss ideas out-of-hand just because they come from the other party or because they have never been tried before.

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GREG STUMBO

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

STUMBO: I think my fellow Democrats would describe me as someone who works hard to uphold the values we stand for but looks to build bridges, not burn them. I think those in the Republican Party would say I am a tough but fair negotiator who realizes that, at the end of the day, we're all on the same side as Kentuckians.

and the other party

**REPRESENTATIVE
WILLIAM “BILL” BATCHELDER**
Ohio Speaker of the House

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

OHIO HOUSE SPEAKER WILLIAM “BILL” BATCHELDER: It’s made it easier, because they have been extremely diligent in doing the work that is required for a really busy session.

SL: In working on the budget, what was your top priority?

BATCHELDER: Balancing the budget and fill-

ing an \$8 billion budget deficit without raising taxes.

SL: What do you wish you had known before you became a leader?

BATCHELDER: Although we have done more than other sessions in recent years, I wish I had known we had the capacity among our members to do even more than we have done already.

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

BATCHELDER: In all things for your own caucus

and the opposition caucus, be fair.

SL: What do you wish you had more time for?

BATCHELDER: I wish I had more time to interact with individual members.

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

BATCHELDER: Probably be on the court of appeals, but certainly not retired.



REPRESENTATIVE BOBBY HARRELL
South Carolina Speaker of the House

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

SOUTH CAROLINA HOUSE SPEAKER BOBBY HARRELL: The past several elections have



resulted in large freshmen classes for the South Carolina House, each consisting of well over 20 new members in our 124-member House. This has greatly changed the landscape of

House committees and has even produced new committee chairs.

I think this influx of new blood into the legislature is a good thing for the body. Each new member brings a fresh set of eyes to examine the issues we are debating. Our members ran for a reason, and those reasons give the entire body a better perspective on what our state’s citizens are thinking.

SL: What is your top budget priority?

HARRELL: South Carolina’s general fund budget has fallen from \$7 billion to \$5 billion in just two years. In dealing with this significant budget shortfall, our top priority was to not raise taxes but instead to cut government spending to balance our budget—and that is exactly what we did. Raising taxes in this environment is one of the worst things you can do to a recovering economy.

SL: What do you wish you had known before you became a leader?

HARRELL: A whole lot. But many lessons in life can only be truly learned by experiencing them firsthand. During my legislative and business careers, I have had many successes and many failures—and I have learned a great deal from both. I am the leader and the speaker I am today because of the journey that has led me here. Getting to this position in the House wasn’t easy, nor should it be. It is something that must be earned. If I had to do it all over again, I don’t think I would change much. A leader is not made by the situations they face; a true leader is made by how they deal with those situations.

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

HARRELL: Be fair. Be strong. Be open to all ideas. But in the end, always do what you believe is right and what you truly believe is best for your state. As I tell every freshman legislator, “There are really only two things that you possess as a House member, your word and your vote.”

SL: What do you wish you had more time for?

HARRELL: I wish I had more time to devote to my family. In the precious little time we are granted in life, cherish every moment you can with your family. As part-time legislators and full-time business people, our demands are great and

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—SOUTH CAROLINA HOUSE
SPEAKER BOBBY HARRELL

our schedules are always packed. But we should never forget the bedrock of support that makes all that we do possible—the devotion of our family.

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

HARRELL: I’d still have the same full-time job back home of being a small business owner, husband and father. While a life outside the legislature would give me much more time to dedicate to my life back home, it is a true honor to serve my state in the House of Representatives. As lawmakers, we have the opportunity to improve our state and the lives of our citizens with our service, which makes it more than a worthwhile endeavor.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

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