

Three leaders on pragmatism and



Senator Mike Flood (NP)
Nebraska Speaker of the Legislature

State Legislatures: What were your biggest challenges this session?

Flood: The budget, of course, and our state economy remained priorities. Other priorities included finding solutions to our state's child welfare reform efforts, maintaining needed funding for roads, ending an ongoing funding dispute among community colleges, and deciding how to implement the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act while we await the Supreme Court's decision.

SL: What was your top priority for the FY 2013 budget?

Flood: I think our top priority was retaining the necessary cuts that were made last session. There will be some pressure to take another look at the decisions we made, but I think our focus has to be on rebuilding the state's savings account or cash reserve, which allowed us to weather the storm of the recent years without increasing taxes.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

Flood: Nebraska is unique with its nonpartisan unicameral Legislature. As speaker, in our institution I deal directly

with the membership and not with party caucuses. A one-house model probably could not work everywhere, but it has served our state well and allowed a collaborative approach to issues that many times bridges party lines.

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

Flood: Let others lead and become leaders. Committees and their chairs have tremendous expertise in their subject matter. Listen to them, work with them.

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

Flood: It's a constant effort to balance legislative duties, especially the evening and weekend engagements, and family. Without a doubt, it has been a privilege to serve in the Legislature. There really is no such thing as a part-time legislator, though, so I've really come to appreciate the time that I do get to spend with my wife and our two young boys.

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—HOUSE SPEAKER
CHRISTOPHER G. DONOVAN (D),
CONNECTICUT



Representative Christopher G. Donovan (D)
Connecticut Speaker of the House

State Legislatures: What were your top priorities this session?

Donovan: No. 1 was jobs—keeping those we have and creating new opportunities in growth areas. We passed a sweeping jobs bill last fall. We want to build on that to help small businesses and entrepreneurs and create new jobs. We need to raise our minimum wage. Those earning the minimum wage can't meet their most basic needs. That's not right. We're also tackling education reform. We need to close a huge achievement gap to give young people hope and the chance for meaningful jobs. Finally, we need to balance our budget to provide the stability necessary to accomplish other goals.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

Donovan: The answer is respect and communication. It says something that I've twice been unanimously elected speaker. The minority leader and I have a good relationship. We're miles apart philosophically, but we respect each other, talk a lot and get things done. Last year's bipartisan jobs bill gave the people in our state a chance to see us work-

partisanship, taxes and teamwork

ing together for their benefit, in contrast to what's going on in Washington.

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

Donovan: I believe in what's possible, and I learned early in my professional life the power of people working together. Success then came from collaboration and negotiation. Those are valuable principles in the legislature, especially for leaders. Our greatest achievements happen when citizens, legislators from both parties, the administration and advocates work together for initiatives that help people.

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

Donovan: Be a great listener, use your skills to bring people together, and work towards an economic recovery. Find ways to spend time outside of the Capitol where you can talk with everyday citizens about their concerns and ideas for fixing some of the problems we face.

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

Donovan: I'd likely be organizing people who need a voice. Before I ran for office, I was fighting for better wages, affordable housing and access to the political system that can make a difference in their lives. Or I'd probably be playing guitar in a rock 'n' roll band. I still play—in a group called the Bad Reps—but not as much as I'd like.



Representative Beth Harwell (R)
Tennessee Speaker of the House

State Legislatures: What were your goals for this session?

Harwell: My No. 1 priority was ensuring that Tennessee remains one of the most business-friendly states in the country. Low taxes, less regulation and an efficient state government will attract businesses and spur entrepreneurship in Tennessee, helping to create jobs. We also must balance our state budget while keeping taxes low and putting money aside for a rainy day.

SL: What was your top priority for the FY 2013 budget?

Harwell: We are required by our state constitution to balance our budget every year. Tennessee has fared well throughout the economic recession because of responsible and conservative fiscal management, and we must continue this practice. We have one of the lowest debt ratios in the United States, and our bonding is excellent. As we craft a budget, we must be mindful of these issues.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

Harwell: In Tennessee, we work well with Democratic leadership. On tough issues, there is always legislative debate,

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—HOUSE SPEAKER BETH HARWELL (R), TENNESSEE

but unlike the partisan sniping in Washington, D.C., it is constructive. When it comes to the most important issues, we may disagree, but we always work together to accomplish what's best for Tennessee.

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

Harwell: I did not realize how much the members of my caucus would want to help me succeed. We work as a team, and they understand that, when their leadership team succeeds, everyone in the state benefits. It's humbling to have the support of my colleagues, a group of true public servants.

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

Harwell: The honor of serving as speaker of the House comes with a huge time commitment and a lot of responsibility to view how policy might affect the state as a whole. However, it is important to remember that you still serve your district as their state representative, and you must weigh their thoughts and concerns with your added task of governing the House.