

Two Leaders on Respect, Bipartisanship and Public Service



Senator Paul Bookout (D)
Arkansas Senate President Pro Tempore

SL: How do you work with the other party?

Bookout: I work extremely well with all senators, and my ability to do so is not based on party affiliation. I have a great deal of respect for members of both parties and their respective districts; regardless of party or seniority, everyone has a place at the table. Our Senate leadership is bipartisan, including diverse party chairmanships. It is in the best interest of the Senate to remain this way and is an effective way of getting things done. Arkansas has been successful in maintaining this balance and avoiding the polarization that can lead to ineffective government.

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

Bookout: I bring a lifetime of experience. I was fortunate to have been raised in the state legislature. After six years in the House, my father was elected to the Senate and spent more than 30 years representing Craighead County, including serving as president pro tempore. I was interested in his work and exposed to all angles of government.

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

Bookout: Without question, I knew the position would require a tremendous amount of time, but I was not fully knowledgeable of the impact it would have on my ability to be involved with my committees. I love the committee aspect of the legislative process. It is where the rubber meets the road. I enjoy debating and carrying legislation. However, time constraints and responsibilities drastically reduced my committee involvement. This was not a huge surprise, but I still wanted to be in two or more places at one time.

SL: How would members of your party describe you? And those from the other party?

Bookout: Regardless of which party you ask, I think I would be described as fair. I am and have always been a proud Arkansas Democrat and am extremely proud of the political heritage of the party. I’ve worked hard to pay my dues and do my part to serve my state. I respect the beliefs of any party and operate from a bipartisan standpoint, reviewing issues on the merits, and doing what I think is in the best interest of my constituency and the State of Arkansas. Some may find fault that I am not regarded as a huge “party person,” but I hope I have their respect for seeing issues clearly and completely.

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

Bookout: I love what I am doing today as director of system relations at St. Bernards Regional Medical Center. Yet, considering the belief and depth of public service in my family, not serving my community in some form is unimaginable. For me, the beauty of serving in the legislature is the opportunity to serve the public both through elected office and through working in the health care industry. It is the best of both worlds.



Representative Philip Gunn (R)
Mississippi Speaker of the House

SL: What were your priorities this year?

Gunn: I wanted to create a functional House of Representatives—one that would allow all voices to be heard and one that would follow

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the rules and maintain honor and decorum. To accomplish this, we knew that the House must be properly organized with good chairmen in place. We appointed competent chairmen from both parties, all of whom have provided great leadership this year. Because of the great work of all our chairmen, we were able to pass some great legislation, and we produced a budget that lives within our means and pushes forward more than \$200 million for next year. And, we did all of this in 10 days less than we were allotted, saving the taxpayers more than \$300,000 in legislative expenses.

SL: What was your top budget priority?

Gunn: We had three goals:

- ◆ To live within our means and not spend more money than we have.
- ◆ To eliminate our dependence on one-time money.
- ◆ To push forward \$200 million for next year. We accomplished all three goals.

SL: How do you work with the other party?

Gunn: I attempted to treat all members with respect, and I tried to be fair and impartial in all my dealings with them regardless of party affiliation.

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

Gunn: I did not anticipate the large number of requests I would get from citizens, lobbyists and agency heads to meet with me to discuss their issues. This presented some scheduling difficulties I had to learn how to handle.

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

Gunn: Realize that you are in the position to serve, not to be served. Be fair and honest.

SL ONLINE

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