



SHOULD YOU FOCUS ON LAWMAKER EFFECTIVENESS TO CAST YOUR BALLOT? VOTERS, EXPERTS SAY YES - CRONKITE NEWS

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When he considers who to vote for, Gilbert small business owner John Webster looks beyond campaign positions, going so far as to create a spreadsheet listing candidates' bipartisanship, their success rate in passing bills and their opinions on the 2020 election.

Webster concedes he is probably an "anomaly." Experts say more voters should be like him.

With 10 of Arizona's 11 congressional seats up for election this year, experts and voters are urging Arizonans to consider the range of an incumbent's performance, everything from how many bills they pass to how often they show up and how well they work across the aisle.

"That's something that we found that voters do care about but that they don't know enough about," said Craig Volden, the co-director of the Center for Effective Lawmaking, a University of Virginia and Vanderbilt University collaboration that studies how good lawmakers are at their jobs.

"In the campaign setting, almost every member says they're effective and almost all of their opponents say the member is ineffective," Volden said.

But there are ways to measure effectiveness.

Passing grades

One way is [GovTrack](#), an independent website that aggregates information on all legislation in Congress, the sponsors and more. Cronkite News analyzed the data to figure out which members of the state's current congressional delegation have been most successful at getting bills passed into law.

Lawmakers put their names on scores of bills every year, but the analysis only looked at those bills where the Arizona member was the lead sponsor. It includes bills that were introduced by an Arizona member and later rolled into larger legislative vehicles.

The data shows that Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, I-Arizona, Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Tucson, and Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Bullhead City, have passed the most bills of the delegation. Sinema has passed 15 bills, Grijalva 14 and Gosar 12.

Sinema, who has served in both the House and Senate, said in an email that she is “proud to have written, negotiated, and passed historic laws investing in Arizona’s infrastructure, fueling semiconductor manufacturing, protecting marriage, funding mental health programs to address the roots of violence, and much more. I promised Arizonans I’d work with anyone to get stuff done and my approach has delivered lasting results for our state.”



Republican Reps. Juan Ciscomani of Tucson, Eli Crane of Oro Valley and Debbie Lesko of Peoria round out the bottom three of the delegation. Lesko and Ciscomani have each passed two bills while Crane hasn’t passed any.

Part of that is due to tenure: While Grijalva has been in Congress for 20 years, Crane and Ciscomani were only sworn in in January 2023. By comparison, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, has passed the most legislation of any lawmaker currently in Congress, passing 103 bills during his 47 years in office.

And Arizona’s lawmakers are not slackers by any means. As of November, the average member of Congress had passed about 7.5 bills during their time in office, and 129 had not passed any bills in the current Congress, with the majority of those members having been elected or appointed within the last year.

Volden said there are a lot of factors that contribute to a lawmaker’s ability to get bills passed. This includes whether they’re in the majority or minority party, how long they’ve been in Congress and how much seniority they have in their party.

“More effective lawmakers also specialize, they find the issues that they have backbone expertise on, where they serve on a committee that deals with those issues, where voters back home actually care about issues and that’s their legislative portfolio instead of being really spread out,” Volden said.

Grijalva is one of those lawmakers. As the ranking member on the House Natural Resources Committee, nearly half of the bills he introduces deal with natural resources and the environment.

“As the top Democrat on Natural Resources Committee, I have used this role to work with administrations to enact vital policy changes from improving tribal consultation and protecting the Grand Canyon to strengthening the Endangered Species Act,” Grijalva said in an emailed statement.

Experts like Volden say successfully passing legislation is just one measure for voters to consider, as few bills actually become law. According to GovTrack, only 7% of bills introduced between January 2021 and January 2023 passed. Most of those, for the Arizona delegation, were bills dealing with local issues.

Volden said this low percentage is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the sheer number of members in Congress, which of them are in the majority party and the learning curve for newer members.

Working across the aisle

There are other metrics that can help determine the effectiveness of lawmakers. One is the [Bipartisan Index](#), a ranking from The Lugar Center and Georgetown University that orders lawmakers based on how well they work across the aisle.

Arizona’s lawmakers sit at both the top and the bottom of that index, with Sinema [ranked fourth](#) out of 98 senators included in the list for 2021, the most recent years for which scores are available. Republican Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Gilbert, by contrast, [ranked 432nd](#) out of 435 representatives that year.

Webster, a Republican who runs a millwork and cabinetry business in Gilbert, said he found the Bipartisan Index while researching the candidates on his ballot. Webster lives in Biggs’ congressional district and said he was disappointed to see how little his representative

works with the other party.



“It makes me feel like he has put his party as a higher priority than his district and (higher) than the country,” Webster said.

Arizona’s Democrats tend to be more bipartisan than the state’s Republicans. Crane and Ciscomani are excluded from the rankings, as the 2023 analysis has not yet been released. But in ranking the remaining nine – five Democrats and four Republicans – the index gave higher scores to four of the Democrats and lowest scores to three of the Republicans.

Webster said bipartisanship is a critical issue for him as a voter, especially with how divided Congress and the state Legislature are.

“Generally that’s the better approach,” Webster said. “You have tackled the issue in such a way that is less partisan, and probably more productive.”

He said he wishes more voters would consider merits above party labels when researching candidates.

“That’s the dilemma I think we face is educating folks to look past just the label of Democrat or Republican,” Webster said. “And you have to dig a little deeper, put a little effort in and find out, ‘OK, are they working across the aisle, looking for real solutions, trying to address the problems?’ It just takes a little more time and effort to be that type of voter.”

Another possible metric is a lawmaker’s attendance record. According to GovTrack, Arizona’s lawmakers have some of the best and worst attendance records in Congress. Rep. Greg Stanton, D-Phoenix, comes out on top among the Arizona delegation after not missing a single vote in 2023 and only missing 0.2% of votes during his four-year tenure.

Grijalva and Lesko are tied for the worst attendance record in the delegation, with both missing 6.5% of votes during their respective 20 and five years in office. And Grijalva has said he may not be around as much as he receives treatment for cancer in his home city of Tucson, while Lesko is leaving Congress after this term and seeking a seat on the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

Doing the research

Webster said most of his friends don’t do research on candidates as deeply as he does, and often rely on his spreadsheet for guidance.

“It’s interesting because people I know who are educated, involved members of the community don’t want to do the research and have asked ‘Hey, can you share with me your spreadsheet?’” he said.

Becky Wyatt, a registered Democrat who lives in Gilbert, said her vote is influenced by a combination of legislative effectiveness and a lawmakers’ reputation. For her, reputation can often outweigh effectiveness: Despite Sinema’s record in passing legislation and working across the aisle, for example, Wyatt said she is disillusioned with her as a candidate.

“I actually donated to her campaign and was very enthusiastic about her running,” Wyatt said. “I gave her money on behalf of my family and friends for Christmas presents, I shared her commercials and I will never vote for her again.”

Wyatt and Webster said that more information is needed to help voters make the most informed decisions possible.

Webster said he uses organizations like Civic Engagement Beyond Voting and his local chamber of commerce to learn about candidates. Wyatt said she looks to organizations that support causes she cares about to see which candidates they endorse and what work lawmakers have done in those areas.

Webster said he often turns to local news for information but acknowledges that media can have biases.

“To be well informed takes effort and you have to understand that the media you’re consuming obviously, inherently has a bias,” Webster

said. "So you've got to either sample from both sides of the political spectrum or try to find the one source that is unbiased which I think most people would agree is rare or doesn't exist."



Not every voter is going to have a spreadsheet like Webster's. But both Wyatt and Webster said voters can still work with friends and neighbors to be informed about the candidates on the ballot.

"Really just lean on your more politically active friends, like people text me or call me the day of voting or the day before voting, 'Hey, I did all my research for all the candidates except the judges. Can you help me on the judges?'" Wyatt said. "Everybody does that. It doesn't make you an uninformed citizen, that makes you trying."