

# House Democrats’ “Accomplishments” Questioned

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Recently, State House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf authored a column in which he used one arm to collectively pat House Democrats on the back while using the other to take an undeserved swipe at House Republicans. We take issue with what he said, but more so with what he omitted.

For instance, the column credited House Democrats for the enactment of legislation that now bars discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Conveniently forgotten was that similar legislation cleared the House of Representatives during the 141<sup>st</sup>, 142<sup>nd</sup>, and 143<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly sessions. On all three occasions, the House was controlled by Republicans and the legislation was blocked in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Another accomplishment attributed to House Democrats was the enactment of House Bill 1, which makes the General Assembly subject to the state’s Freedom of Information Act. House Republicans supported this. In fact, we sponsored and passed similar legislation through the House of Representatives two years earlier. Again, it was blocked in the Senate.

The bottling-up of good government legislation is not limited to the upper chamber. There are at least eight reform bills currently being held in the House Administration Committee controlled by the Democratic majority, the biggest “flaw” of which appears to be their Republican sponsorship.

Two of these bills would require that the state’s operating and capital budgets be introduced a few days prior to a vote, giving the public and the press a chance to comment on the spending plans before they’re enacted. (This year’s \$3.09B, 240-page operating budget was introduced just a day before it needed to be enacted.)

Another bill languishing in the House Administration Committee would require state officials to publically disclose if any of their family members are employed by the state or an organization receiving significant state funding.

We find it hard to understand how anyone could fault these good government measures, let alone work to prevent them from being openly debated on the House floor.

Also among the bills the House Administration Committee has refused to release are five measures to create searchable Internet databases, giving citizens access to how the state and public schools are spending tax money. In other places where they've been implemented, similar initiatives have led to greater scrutiny and cost-cutting suggestions.

Another House Republican bill, that has the potential to save taxpayers millions-of-dollars, is sequestered in the House Labor Committee. HB 110 seeks to temporarily suspend the state's "prevailing wage" requirement on school construction projects. Prevailing wage is a minimum wage for skilled and unskilled workers employed on the state's public works projects. The requirement doesn't apply to private sector projects and 18 states have either never enacted, or repealed, this outdated government mechanism.

In its 2008 report on reducing public school costs, the non-partisan Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware (LEAD) committee estimated that suspending the prevailing wage could save taxpayers \$21 million to \$34 million annually. Construction labor unions oppose this common sense measure and Democrats in state government seem content to spend tens-of-millions of dollars on needlessly inflated wages to keep their political allies happy.

Rep. Schwartzkopf's column also took great satisfaction in the passage of a balanced budget. While we too appreciate this bipartisan feat, House Republicans were generally less than thrilled with how it was accomplished.

To balance the budget, House and Senate Democrats passed a \$212 million package of tax and fee increases, including hiking the state's personal income tax (PIT).

Originally, the PIT proposal spanned three income brackets that would have impacted everyone earning more than \$50,000 annually. It was the intervention of House Republicans – who successfully pushed for an agreement to reduce the state work force by 525 positions via attrition during the current fiscal year – that changed this. Using the millions-of-dollars saved by eliminating these vacated state positions, we reduced the overall size of the PIT increase by 25-percent. The proposal was scaled-back to a single bracket, saving 83-percent of the state's wage-earners from being affected by the increase. The work force reduction savings were also used to leverage the proposed Gross Receipts Tax hike, cutting it by 20-percent.

Just as importantly, it was House Republicans that forced a concession to "sunset" the personal income and gross receipts tax increases after four years. We also attached a time limit to another new law that raised taxes and fees on Delaware's business community by \$127 million annually.

In conclusion, in 2009 House Republicans successfully fought higher taxes, downsized state government, and proposed ideas to make government more accountable and efficient. By contrast, our Democrat House colleagues' "accomplishments" include: enacting higher taxes, obstructing government reforms, and protecting the interests of their political friends. We have no desire to pick a fight with any House Democrat. However, if Majority Leader Schwartzkopf wants to invite a comparison, we feel comfortable contrasting our respective records.

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