

Hi, this is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento governmental relations firm Aprea & Micheli, and an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law in its Capital Lawyering program. Today's podcast is on the role of leadership staff in the lawmaking process.

As you probably are familiar, there are four legislative leaders representing the two political parties in the two houses of the California Legislature. These four individuals are elected by their respective members.

In addition, for the Assembly Speaker and the Senate President Pro Tempore their elections are confirmed by a majority of their respective houses after their caucus members have nominated them for that office.

The two minority leaders of the Assembly and Senate are elected to their respective positions by their caucus members, rather than the entire legislative house.

Staff for these four legislative leaders play a critical role in ensuring that the legislative process goes smoothly during the entire legislative session. As you know, the Legislature considers and votes upon thousands of bills as well as the state budget and a number of corresponding trailer bills to that budget. These staff members, like their four bosses, must balance competing interests all the while keeping their respective caucus members happy and supportive. Many have described this process as akin to herding cats.

While tremendous power over the legislative process rests with the two house leaders - the Assembly Speaker and the Senate President Pro Tem - it also requires tremendous work and sacrifice to make those offices function at a high level during the tenure of the individual leaders. Often, when the leader terms out of office, so do their senior staff due to the grind of those particular jobs over multiple years.

With the new term limits law, it's unknown the impact on the leader and the senior staff. Many hope that key leadership staff will remain for the tenure of their boss's time in the Legislature. In order for the two houses of the California Legislature to properly and efficiently operate there is great reliance on the leadership teams and the professional staff members who staff those leadership members.

These individual staff have to serve their members, serve the house in which they work, and of course serve the people of California, ultimately. It is a difficult and challenging job but one that wield enormous influence over the development and implementation of state public policy here in California.

In the offices of the legislative leaders in the Assembly and Senate, there are both personal and leadership staff members. Now the personal staff are those who work for the individual legislator and work on his or her bills and constituent/district-type work. The leadership staff, on the other hand, not only work for the elected official but also for the broader party caucus.

Both leaders have large policy staff who are assigned several policy committees to keep tabs on. These individuals must monitor the activities of the policy and fiscal committees for which they

have jurisdiction, become involved in the major bills as they make their way through the legislative process, certainly ensure that the caucus priorities are being attained, and apprise the house's leader regarding any problematic issues or measures.

These leadership staff are often involved in the major pieces of legislation to ensure that their party's priorities are met and that bills are shaped to ensure passage on the floors of each house.

At the end of the legislative session leadership staff has to work to make sure that their members' bills are being dutifully considered by the other house and of course alerting their leader of any problems so that they're prepared to deal with concerns that are raised by the respective caucus members.

In performing all of these functions, leadership staff are dealing directly with caucus members and the staff of those caucus members as well as policy and fiscal committee staff and others in order to stay abreast of all of the major bills and issues that are pending in both houses of the Legislature throughout the legislative session.

The leadership staff have often served as committee consultants or worked for several legislators in the past. They undoubtedly have expertise in multiple subject matters. They understand the process and numerous policy issues, and have many contacts in and out of the state capitol. They also are certain to possess political acumen, as they're at the forefront, often, of the crossroads between policy and politics at the California State Capitol.

They certainly possess and understanding of not only policy implications of pending legislation and the budget, but also quite often the political aspects of a bill, the interest groups for and against the legislation, and the potential impacts on legislators in their districts. These policy consultants for the Assembly Speaker and the Senate President Pro Tem report to their respective Policy Director that's housed in the Speaker's Office or the Pro Tem's office.

The Policy Director in each house is an individual who oversees the policy consultants and is the main liaison between the caucus members and the house leader on pending legislation. The Policy Director is an experienced individual with years of service in the Legislature who has been exposed to numerous policy issues and fully appreciates the political and policy implications of pending legislation in the major public policy issues facing the state of California.

In addition, both the Assembly and the Senate leadership staff work with their respective floor analysis units to ensure proper and timely consideration of legislation and amendments, especially around the critical legislative deadlines. This work requires among the leader's office, the majority and minority floor leaders, as well as the Chief Clerk in the Assembly and the Secretary of the Senate.

Also serving the two house leaders are Budget Directors, found in the Assembly Speaker's office and the Senate President Pro Tem's office. The Budget Directors ensure that the caucus priorities are reflected in the budget bill and corresponding trailer bills that follow them. These individual staffers know the ins and outs of the state budget, the legislative and budget processes

themselves, and they've usually served on the Budget Committee staff for years prior to being named to be the Budget Director.

These individuals help negotiate the budget's provisions, certainly when they require the involvement of the leaders - the Speaker and the Pro Tem. These individuals naturally work very closely with the Governor's staff and the senior leadership of the Department of Finance.

Both of the legislative leaders have Press Secretaries and communications individuals. These persons serve as a liaison with the Capitol Press Corps, and they certainly work to ensure that the media cover the top issues and legislation in the best light for the majority and minority parties.

These individuals have often been journalists themselves. Sometimes they've worked on campaign press operations. But they most certainly have an appreciation for the role the media play in the legislative process.

There are two other unique offices that are found in the Legislative Office Building across the street from the Capitol. The first is the Speakers Office of Majority Services which assists the majority party's caucus members focusing on providing services to legislators and their staff of a non-policy nature - such as advising them on constituent outreach, mailers, as well as potentially the political implications of legislation and policy issues. The minority party has a similar office of member services.

Likewise, the houses have offices of research. Particularly well known is the Senate Office of Research, which is actually a bipartisan office that's charged with serving the research needs of the California State Senate and also developing policy initiatives for Senators and legislative committees. The S.O.R. tracks emerging state and federal issues and they often prepare background information for the Senate Rules Committee to consider when they review the Governor's nominees during upcoming confirmation hearings.

I hope you appreciate this brief podcast on reviewing the role of the leadership staff in the California State Capitol.