



## PROFILE: INDIANA HOUSE MAJORITY CAUCUS CHAIR GREG STEUERWALD

‘Listen to the experts’: Relationship building has helped 14-year legislative veteran successfully lead on big policy initiatives — including a new law on policing

by Derek Cantù ([dcantu@csg.org](mailto:dcantu@csg.org))

Over the past decade, Rep. Greg Steuerwald has helped lead some of the most complicated, potentially contentious policy reforms in his home state of Indiana.

He’s gotten it done by starting with a straightforward approach: “Shut up and listen to the experts.”

“I let them tell me what they think is good policy and what is not, and that’s what I’ve done throughout [my legislative career],” he says. “I invite everybody to the table, and then try not to get in their way.”

This past year, that meant bringing together leaders in law enforcement and working with colleagues in Indiana’s Black Legislative Caucus on a measure to enhance policing. Earlier in his career, that collaborative style led to a comprehensive overhaul of the criminal code.

“I tell people this is the most interesting and frustrating job I’ve ever had in my life at the same time,” he says. “I really enjoy being part of the policymaking [process] on a big issue, on statewide issues.”

Steuerwald came to the Indiana House 14 years ago, first by legislative appointment, and has found the position to be a perfect fit — a place to make a difference in his community and state, but in a part-time capacity that allows him to still work as an attorney at the central Indiana firm that bears his name (Steuerwald, Witham & Youngs, LLP).

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Steuerwald, who currently serves as House majority caucus chair, reflected on his leadership style as well as his legislative career and accomplishments to date, including this year’s police measure. Here are excerpts.

**Q** As majority caucus chair, you hold one of three elected positions (along with the speaker and majority floor leader) in a very large caucus — 71 House Republicans. What are some of the leadership challenges?

**A** Whenever you’re dealing with that many different people and that many different opinions, sometimes you have to work on some compromises within your own caucus. You have to try to come up with the best policy and convince everybody within the caucus — this is the best policy and what we want to do at this point in time. So that’s interesting. It can be a challenge sometimes because everybody has some pretty strong opinions.



**Q** This year, you helped to spearhead the unanimous passage of HB 1006, which addresses a wide range of issues related to policing. Can you talk about that measure and your approach to building the consensus you needed?

**A** I cannot begin to tell you how important law enforcement was. They gave me their time and their expertise and their support. Law enforcement in Indiana stood tall. Without them, this would not have gotten done. ...

I was having a conversation with the Sheriffs’ Association president and he said, “You know Greg, everything in law enforcement just begins with proper training. If you have the proper training, everything kind of flows from there.” ...

I met individually with the Police Chiefs’ Association here in Indiana, their representatives. Then I met with the state police superintendent, the Fraternal Order of Police — and in Indiana, to be certified here [as an] Indiana law enforcement officer, you go through the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy, which happens to be in my county. I met with all these groups individually. Every one of them mentioned, “You begin with training.” ...

There were three major topics that [were] gleaned from those conversations. One was the training. Second, we had extensive conversations on car and body cameras. And the third major part of the bill — which probably will have as big an effect on law enforcement as anything we’ve done — is the ability to eliminate what they used to call the “rogue,” now they call the “wandering,” officer. Somebody gets in trouble someplace and quits and moves on, and then he goes on to the next department.

**Q** Why was that issue of the “wandering officer” so important to address?

### BIO-SKETCH: INDIANA REP. GREG STEUERWALD

- ✓ first appointed to Indiana General Assembly in 2007; since elected seven times to represent House district west of Indianapolis
- ✓ serves as majority caucus chair in Indiana House
- ✓ is attorney and partner at Steuerwald, Witham and Youngs, LLP, law firm
- ✓ has law degree from Indiana University-Indianapolis
- ✓ lives in Avon, Ind., with his wife, Christy; has three grown children

**A** My sheriff here from Hendricks County, who’s now the president of the Sheriffs’ Association, said, “We’re all tired of this. We’re all tired of the bad actor causing us all problems.” ... We have our local merit board that can suspend or terminate, but he said, “That didn’t stop [an officer] from going elsewhere. We need to take a look at — with help from the Law Enforcement Academy — how we decertify an officer here in Indiana.”

These guys who get in trouble say, “Hey, I’ll quit if you drop your [disciplinary] action.” And the tendency is to accept that. And [law enforcement groups] said that’s not good policy. So there is language in the law that says these [disciplinary] actions continue even if the officer resigns from his current position. ...

Also in [HB] 1006, we said that the hiring agency must contact the previous employing agency, and the previous employing agency must give the entire employment file. There are no limitations on time. We had a discussion if it should go back five, 10, 20 years. Everybody agreed, No, we’ll just put no limitations of any kind. So if an officer has been at the previous agency 30 years and had an issue 29 years ago, then the new hiring agency is going to see that.

**Q** In terms of the legislative process, how did you go about building such wide support for HB 1006, including on the other side of the aisle among your Democratic colleagues?

**A** Robin Shackelford is the chair of the Black Legislative Caucus, and the caucus had contacted our House speaker last summer about the issue and he said at the time, “Hey, Steuerwald is working on this.” So the caucus contacted me. ...

I was very open with them and said, “Here are some things that we’re not going to do.” They were the same things I

told law enforcement I was not going to do. We’re not going to eliminate qualified immunity. We’re not going to totally eliminate chokeholds. We may put some limitations on them, which is exactly what we ended up doing. We defined chokeholds as deadly force. So a law enforcement officer that’s in a deadly-force situation can use a chokehold under the same circumstances that he can use a firearm. ...

In talking with Robin, I was kind of doing my thing, writing the bill and meeting with different groups and entities. ... Robin was meeting with her constituencies and telling them what was going on. We both had our issues to deal with, and she was fantastic. I mean, I couldn’t ask for a better partner.

**Q** You led efforts to revamp Indiana’s criminal code and sentencing laws. What did you seek to accomplish with those reforms, which took effect in 2014?

**A** That kind of major overhaul of the criminal code hadn’t been done in almost 40 years here in Indiana. ...

I always like to say that we separated the people we’re mad at from the people we’re afraid of, and dealt with them differently. We focused our attention on increasing penalties for crimes against a person, but then we took a different, alternative look at a lot of drug penalties. And we established what’s called Recovery Works. It’s in all 92 counties now and provides mental health and addiction services to those in the criminal justice system, which the last I heard we’ve had around 60,000 people go through. I’m sure it’s a lot more than that now.

There was a study done a couple of years ago, and we’ve reduced rates of recidivism substantially, and economic savings to the state have been in the \$100 million range. So that investment was very well worth it for many different reasons.