



# PROFILE: INDIANA SENATE MINORITY LEADER GREG TAYLOR

Become ‘comfortable with being uncomfortable’: Lessons from a legislator who’s always served in the minority party caucus, and is now leading one

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

**G**reg Taylor’s connection with state government began long before he ran for office.

Shortly after graduating from law school in 1996, he moved to Indianapolis to work for the then-Indiana Department of Commerce (now the Indiana Economic Development Corporation).

“I was responsible for helping bring jobs to the citizens of the state of Indiana through economic development incentives,” Taylor says. “Through that relationship, I met a lot of legislators; one of them happened to be the senator that I [would succeed], Sen. Glenn Howard.”

Howard regularly called on Taylor for support with legal analysis. But in 2006, Howard became ill, and his wife convinced a reluctant Taylor to pursue the seat.

Ever since joining the Senate in 2009, Taylor has served in the minority party, a Democrat in a state where Republicans have long had full control of the Indiana legislature and governor’s office.

“I’ve learned how to become comfortable with being uncomfortable,” he says.

In part, that means asking tough questions and demanding answers from the majority party, even when he might be one of the few dissenting voices in the room, or the only one.

“What keeps me going is making sure that I represent those people who typically don’t have a voice in this body,” Taylor adds.

But he also has found ways of partnering with Republican colleagues — for example, working on a law to expand newborn screenings in order to detect three rare genetic diseases, and strengthening Indiana’s oversight of pharmacy benefit managers.

“People believe when you serve in a minority position in the legislature that it’s just frustration all the time,” Taylor says. “I’ve figured out a way, somehow, to make sure that some of our Democratic legislation is heard.”

Taylor was selected leader of the Senate Democrats in November 2020, becoming the first Black lawmaker in Indiana history to head a legislative caucus. In an interview with CSG Midwest, Taylor shared his perspective on leadership and his determination to advance his caucus’s policy goals. Here are excerpts.

**Q** How would you describe your leadership style?

**A** It’s more of a cooperative leadership style because, as far as me as a legislator, I just enjoy working and helping people. I also tend to try to be as fluid as I can, because I think sometimes



## BIO-SKETCH: INDIANA SEN. GREG TAYLOR

- ✓ selected Senate minority leader in 2020, becoming the first Black legislator to lead a party caucus in Indiana history
- ✓ first elected to the Indiana Senate in 2008
- ✓ is a business and government attorney who also once worked in the Indiana Department of Commerce
- ✓ lives in the state capital of Indianapolis with his wife, Danielle; and their three children

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we get stuck in these traditional kinds of ways that we do business.

**Q** How about the work you do, leader to leader, with Republican colleagues?

**A** I’ve gone to the leadership of the supermajority, and they’ve been really, I think, accommodating to some of our members. This year, we had 14 Senate Democratic bills receive hearings and advance out of the Senate, and many of those have already received House hearings and progressed as well. It’s just all around a good relationship that has existed before [between Senate and House leaders], but now is coming to the forefront.

**Q** Indiana has been in the middle of some of the contentious social issues we’re seeing across the country. What kind of impact has this had in the legislature?

**A** There’s a phrase I use called “steady plodding.” You have to be cognizant of the fact that we don’t all represent the same group of constituents. But from my perspective, we also have to look at it from the society as a whole. Far too much of this partisan stuff that we deal with is based on, ‘My district feels differently than yours.’ I would assume that not everybody in a district is monolithic in their thoughts.

**Q** Your caucus prioritized education and health care this budget-setting year. What specific changes have you pursued in these areas?

**A** The elimination of what we call the “textbook tax” here in Indiana was something our caucus has been talking about for years, and it was put forth this session in the governor’s budget proposal. Thankfully, we were able to get that language successfully included in HB 1001. Unfortunately, those textbook fees are not fully covered in the House-proposed budget, instead passing the costs off to schools. My caucus will be pushing for an actual elimination of the full cost of book fees for Hoosiers and schools in the Senate budget.

We’re also still in the midst of trying to get proportionality when it comes to the allocation of new dollars for education. We’ve always been very proud about the fact that we spend over 60 percent of our budget on K-12 education. Unfortunately, this year, we’re going to see our voucher system get an increase of approximately 30 percent in funding while total base student funding for traditional public schools, where 90 percent of students are educated, receive a 3.3 percent increase in FY 2024 and even less in FY 2025.

We’re advocating to fully fund recommendations of the Public Health Commission. Right now, we rank dismally compared to the rest of the country when it comes to public health, and we feel like we’ve got some momentum moving for an increase in the funding for public health [from approximately \$7.5 million to \$240 million]. Then, from what we put under our health initiative, we want to eliminate the “pink tax” — taxes on menstrual products that we see as a tax on women.

**Q** In the area of criminal justice, you are the co-author of a bipartisan bill this year [SB 136] to establish a database with the names of

people who are prohibited from carrying firearms. Why is this needed?

**A** We knew that when we passed our permitless-carry law [in 2022], law enforcement officers would not have the information readily available to determine whether or not a person was eligible [to carry a firearm]. Now that we have that permitless-carry law in place, it’s only smart for us to be able to allow law enforcement officers to have these tools readily accessible.

It’s going to be used with discretion, so there’s some guardrails we need to put on it, but it’s definitely something that we need from a public safety standpoint.

**Q** On another measure, you have been vocal in your opposition to a proposed constitutional amendment eliminating access to bail to individuals deemed a “substantial risk to the public.” What are your concerns about a change like this?

**A** Bail was created to allow people to access freedom before they were convicted of a crime, and was available for everyone except those suspected of murder or treason. What we do with SJR 1 is say, it doesn’t matter if you are charged with misdemeanor battery or murder, the court or the prosecutor can determine that you’re a threat to society, the public at large, and deny you bail.

Bail shouldn’t be a way to discriminate against poor people and people of color. To know that we already have these disparities that exist, and then to further restrict bail, is just exacerbating that issue.