



Wisconsin Senate President Pro Tempore

PATRICK TESTIN

‘My door is wide open’: How he learned early on to embrace collaboration, sometimes from unlikely legislative partners

For Patrick Testin, a trip to Madison to see his grandparents as a child usually came with one request: Can we see the Capitol? His grandfather, Blair, gladly obliged. He worked right by the iconic building, as a longtime, widely respected leader of Wisconsin’s state retirement system and a nationally recognized expert on public pensions.

“We’d hop in his car and go down to the Square, and I was just enamored with that Capitol building and its beauty,” Testin says. “I knew that at some point I wanted to work there in some form or fashion. I never dreamed it would be in this capacity.”

Testin has called it his work home for 10 years, first elected to the Senate in 2016 and since becoming one of the state’s top legislative leaders. He currently serves as Senate president pro tempore.

Just as those drives with Grandpa helped spark an early interest in government, talks with Mom and Dad growing up have shaped at least part of his approach to being a legislator.

“If I didn’t talk to Democrats, I wouldn’t talk to my own parents,” Testin jokes, noting the political split in his own family.

A goal of his now as a legislator: That his colleagues, regardless of party, think of him as someone open to talking, debating and, when possible, working together on policy. “One of the approaches that I took from day one of being an elected official is to basically go door to door, introduce myself to my Democrat colleagues, and just say, ‘Look, if you have ideas you think we can work together on, my door is wide open,’” Testin says.

He reflected on this approach in a recent interview with CSG Midwest, while also discussing his views on leadership and legislating, including work on a new law that aims to improve health care access across Wisconsin. Here are excerpts.



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Q: Since you were a child, you have had an interest in government, politics and U.S. history. What part about the job of state legislator, in particular, do you value?

A: Look at the driving forces impacting people’s daily lives — their property taxes, infrastructure, money for highways, our school system, health care. You name it.

When I take a look at that and what state legislators can do — the actual impact that we have — I think I can get more done being one out of 33 senators down in Madison as opposed to being one of 435 in the U.S. House or one of 100 in the U.S. Senate.

Q: Health care is an area where you’ve become a policy leader, serving as a committee chair and, most recently, helping get a new law passed that creates a new licensure pathway for nurses to operate independently as advance practice registered nurses (APRN). Why was that such a priority bill for you?

A: It’s really important that we look for ways to increase access in our underserved and rural communities. So this [AB 257] is one of the bills that I’m most proud of. It was a huge bipartisan win.

APRN legislation in our state has been around, in some form or fashion, for almost 15 years, but it had never gotten across the finish line. For three consecutive sessions, I was the bill’s author. The first go-around, it got vetoed by the governor. The second time around, it got vetoed again.

I was almost ready to call it off, but then we sat down with the various stakeholders and said, “Look, we have a shortage of health care providers here in the state. We have an aging demographic here in the state of Wisconsin. This is not going to get any easier. We need to get this done.”

Q: How did the third time become the charm?

A: It was a lot of long negotiations with stakeholders, plus conversations with the governor’s staff and even some of my colleagues who in previous sessions had voted against it. We made some compromises. They made some.

We found enough consensus on the work and education requirements that the APRNs will need in order to have the ability to go out and independently practice and operate at the highest level of their license, which is what we should be doing to empower all medical providers.

It was a classic example of sometimes having to look at yourself in the mirror and realize, I’m not going to get 100 percent of what I want. You’ve got to make some concessions and compromises. Both sides did.

Q: It also was an example of needing to work in a bipartisan way. Is that something you strive to do?

A: Probably one of the best pieces of advice that I was ever given came before I even took my oath of office. It was from my former colleague, Senator Leah Vukmir, who had been a longtime member. She told me, “You’re going to want to have relationships with folks on the other side of the aisle.”

What astonished me right from the start was that I became very close with people that I never thought would be the case. I had watched them on the floor, getting so fired up with speeches that left me thinking, “There is no way I’m ever going to get along with that individual.”

But then you meet them one-on-one and it’s like, “Holy cow, you’re actually a great individual, you’re a great person. I want to grab a beer with you.”

So I still hold on to that advice and pass it on to new members.

Q: Over the course of your 10 years in the Senate, what have you observed and learned about the keys to effective legislative leadership?

A: It depends somewhat on the makeup of your respective caucus and what the issue of the day is. But generally, I think a leader needs to have a clear vision and be able to clearly articulate and explain the approach to members, as opposed to just coming into a room and saying, “We are doing this, and that’s that.”

Because it’s very easy for individuals to go into their corners and just say, “Well, I’m not going to take part in any of this.” I’ve seen instances where there have been some bills that have been rather heavy lifts, and where maybe the communication wasn’t where it needed to be on the front end. Then you’re behind right away and it becomes much more difficult to get buy-in. ...

Oftentimes, too, it’s about taking time to reach out to members one-on-one. There are instances where members don’t necessarily want to voice their opinions in front of everyone.

So as a leader, make your case one-on-one as opposed to putting people right on the spot, which sometimes can make it tricky to get the actual truth out of them.

Interview by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

WISCONSIN SENATOR
PATRICK TESTIN

- first elected to the state Senate in 2016
- serves as Senate president pro tempore as well as chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue and vice chair of the powerful Joint Committee on Finance
- is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a bachelor’s degree in political science
- is a 2018 graduate of CSG Midwest’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development
- resides in the Wisconsin town of Hull with his wife, Hannah
- is an avid hunter, history buff, and Wisconsin Badger football fan

Michigan Representative

ANN BOLLIN



PROFILE

Fiscal leader reflects on changes to budget-making process — and results — over past two years

Ann Bollin says she came to Lansing eight years ago with one policy goal above all else: “Be a budget hawk.” Her chance to do so took off in early 2025, when Speaker Matt Hall tapped Bollin to be chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

“It has come with a whole new level of responsibility, something that I never take for granted,” she says. “You don’t do it for the title or the prestige. You do it because you have a vision for wanting more accountability and transparency. And if you look at what we’ve done, I think we are transforming the process. Our approach to budgeting has been very different, and I’m extremely proud of that record.”

Two years of spending reductions. Greater transparency and controls over legislative earmarks. More oversight of state agency spending. A new \$2 billion plan to fund the state’s transportation infrastructure.

Bollin points to those changes as some of the most significant accomplishments, and they all have occurred during a time of shared partisan control of Michigan’s state government (Republican-led House, Democrat-led Senate and Democratic governor).

“People often hear me say, ‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’” And look at what has been done here,” she says.

Bollin’s fiscal vision was shaped in part by her many years of service in local government. She was clerk of Michigan’s Brighton Township for 16 years (from 2003 to 2018), a position she held longer than anyone else in the township’s history. She administered elections and managed local finances, and regularly dealt with the impacts of decisions being made in the state Capitol.

“What goes on in Lansing doesn’t stay in Lansing,” Bollin says. “I went there because I saw two decisions being made at the state level that I didn’t agree with. One had to do with elections, and one had to do with unfunded liabilities.”

Earlier in her legislative career, a bipartisan measure (HB 4491 of 2022) became law that creates new chain-of-custody rules for drop-box ballots, requires regular updating and cleaning up of voter rolls, and allows township clerks to pre-process absentee ballots before Election Day.

State laws also have contributed to recent improvements in the level of unfunded pension debt.

Since becoming Appropriations Committee chair, Bollin has focused on overall fiscal management and improving the legislative budget process. In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, she discussed this work, what she views as the most significant advances during a time of split partisan control, and her perspective on effective legislating and leadership. Here are excerpts.



“Our approach to budgeting has been very different, and I’m extremely proud of that record.”

Q: What is your overall vision for the state budget for Michigan — what legislators should be investing in while also protecting taxpayers?

A: Infrastructure, education and public safety are really the things that we have to be mindful of. I don’t think the state should be investing in things like splash pads and streetscapes. We should instead be trying to stay out of the way. The most responsive government is the government closest to the people, and in Michigan, we have somewhere around 1,600 communities, of all different sizes. Stay out of their way.

Q: You’ve talked about the importance of budget transparency. How do recent new rules on legislative earmarks (HB 4220 and SB 596) reflect that goal?

A: The year before I was the Appropriations chair, there were \$4 billion worth of earmarks, and this year we’re down to \$125 million. I am extremely proud of that.

We now have in statute a very transparent, open process for those earmarks. Any legislator can bring forth a request to fund a project. It’s called an LDSI, a legislatively directed spending item. But you have to submit a description of the project, the location of it, the cost, and why you think it’s a good use of taxpayers’ dollars.

No project can be funded unless you provide public testimony on it, and you have to submit the project 45 days before a budget is adopted. So that means no last-minute, down-under deals can be done.

Q: How have you sought to improve legislative oversight of spending by state agencies?

A: The first year, we went line by line, looking at every item. Where’s the money coming from? What is it funding? And then this year we went back and did a three-year lookback at how much of that money actually was spent. And what we found out is that these budget line items were bloated.

The general practice of budgeting in the state of Michigan has been that every year we tack on 2 percent, 3 percent, 4 percent to the current year’s budget. We didn’t do that this year. We went back to the “as-spent” numbers, averaging them over the last three years, and took the highest number.

In doing that, we’ve been able to find \$5 billion of areas where we could cut and make reinvestments, either straight-out cuts or make monies available to allow for other investments in what matters to people, like our roads and saving Medicaid.

Q: You’re having to craft fiscal policy and pass budgets during a time of split partisan control. What have you learned along the way about working through differences in the Legislature?

A: I don’t agree with everybody in my caucus, and I don’t agree with everybody across the aisle. But people in those districts send those people here. I do respect that, so I make it a point to make

sure that I’m listening and I’m learning from what people are saying and that I’m approachable and accessible. That certainly served me well moving into this term as the Appropriations chair, because I think I had earned the respect and trust of my colleagues.

Q: Beyond that commitment to relationship building, what advice do you give to newer legislators?

A: Number one, be true to yourself. That’s extremely important: If I don’t have self-respect, nobody else is going to have respect for me. Secondly, I often think of it this way. If my kids saw this on TV, what would they think of their mother? I don’t want my kids to behave badly. I better not behave badly. So pack your patience and pack your manners.

And I’d also say to read all that you can. Come prepared. You’ll learn something new every day. I take great pride in reading and understanding what I’m going to be voting on by doing my research and reaching out for more when I need it.

Interview by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

MICHIGAN REPRESENTATIVE
ANN BOLLIN

- first elected to the state House in 2018
- has served as chair of the House Appropriations Committee since January 2025
- served as clerk of Brighton Township for 16 years (longest-serving clerk in the township’s history)
- is a 2019 graduate of CSG Midwest’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development
- she and her husband, Tim, have three children and are members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul