

Indiana Rep. Terry Goodin

A longtime school superintendent and legislator, minority leader sees dual roles as unique chance to help his home district and state

by Ilene Grossman (igrossman@csg.org)

For nearly two decades, Terry Goodin has been serving in two of his home area's most visible leadership positions — state representative in the Indiana House, superintendent of a K-12 school district.

In 2017, Goodin's legislative colleagues in the House Democratic Caucus gave him a third responsibility, that of minority leader.

The southern Indiana native has always viewed these leadership roles as interconnected, with the experience of being a superintendent informing his work as legislator, and vice versa. In fact, that job as a school administrator helped convince Goodin to run for office in the first place, because he saw how deeply and often policies made in the Statehouse were impacting his schools, students and staff.

He wanted to be part of the decisions being made, and with the recent ascension in leadership, he has an even greater chance to help shape the work and priorities of his caucus and the legislature.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Rep. Goodin discussed his multiple responsibilities, his work as minority leader, and his vision for Indiana. Here are excerpts:

Q: How has your experience as an educator impacted your approach to working with your colleagues in the legislature? Are there some lessons that were applicable?

A: Being an educator has given me a huge leg up. When working with constituents, I can reflect back to when I was in the classroom with 35 or 40 different personalities every period. When I became an administrator, I worked not only with the students, but with parents, school board members, other administrators and the community. The experience of social and personal interaction that I gained as an educator has tremendously impacted the way I work with individuals in the legislature, and how to communicate in a way that is comfortable for them.

Q: In late fall of 2017, you were elected to be the leader of your caucus. What made you decide to run for caucus leader, and how did you go about pursuing the leadership path?

A: I don't know if you ever decide to run for leader, like you decide to run for office. What happens is that the trust and confidence that your colleagues have in you actually lifts you up into that position. Sometimes it is better if colleagues come to you to consider running for leader, rather than you simply deciding to run.

Being a member of the state Budget Committee [a five-member body composed of one legislator from each caucus along with the state budget director], as well as the Ways and Means Committee, gave me a good perspective to sit in the leader's seat. I had a good perspective about Indiana's policies, because I could see how and where we are spending our money and whether it is being spent in the most efficient way.

Bio-sketch of Rep. Terry Goodin

- ✓ minority leader in Indiana House since 2017; first elected to legislature in 2000
- ✓ superintendent for southern Indiana's Crothersville Community Schools; previously served as a teacher and school administrator
- ✓ raises beef cattle on family farm
- ✓ he and his wife, Darcie, have three children



“Disagree if you have to, but make the disagreements about policy and not personalities.”

Q: What do you view as some of the qualities and characteristics of an effective leader, and how would you describe your style in the legislature?

A: I feel like there isn't a lot of difference between being a good legislator and a good leader. The qualities are similar. You should work hard, care about others, and listen to their thoughts and ideas. You need to understand that the members of your caucus all come from different areas of the state. Their thoughts, and the concerns of their respective communities, can be quite different than the ones you bring to the table from a different area of the state. As a leader, you also have to be willing to make the tough choices and tough decisions. Others may not always agree, but you have to be able to explain your reasoning and move on.

Q: The Indiana House, Senate and governor's office are controlled by Republicans. How do you go about trying to get legislation passed as a member of the minority party?

A: First, you should make friends on the other side. If you don't, it will be difficult to get things passed in the minority. Disagree where you have to, but make the disagreements about policy and not personalities. Focus on your areas of agreement and discuss your differences. Sometimes this will get you to an agreement, but there are times when it won't. That's OK, too, since that is the reason we have different parties; sometimes philosophical differences can't be overcome.

You just can't get stuck in the mud; you have to be able to move forward onto the next issue. I always stress that we need to have discussions about policy, and not personalities. A lot of times people get emotionally invested in the bills, and then when the bill gets derailed, they take that

personally. I think one of the biggest problems we have in the legislature is that people take things too personally. If we can keep our eye on the best policies, rather than personalities, we get the most bang for our buck.

Q: What are some of the most rewarding parts of being a legislator?

A: I honestly believe that I give people a voice in the Statehouse who feel like they have no voice. I am very accessible, and I feel like I give people in my southern Indiana district, who often have no dealings with Indianapolis, a way to be heard and to work through red tape and other frustrations with government.

Q: What are some of your biggest frustrations with the legislature, or what would you most like to change?

A: I don't get frustrated with the legislature. It's a process and it's a system. There is always room to tweak things and make them a little better. If you start getting frustrated with the process, you probably should question whether it might be time to move on to your next role. While the wheels of government move slowly, it is structured that way deliberately, keeping in mind that there is always room to improve bipartisanship.

Q: What do you see as some of your state's biggest challenges and opportunities over the next 15 to 20 years?

A: Our challenges in Indiana are not unlike those in other states with similar demographics. We need to particularly focus on job training and workforce development. We sometimes have a tendency in Indiana to rest on our laurels, but we have to remember that we need to always continue to move forward and make things better for all Hoosiers.