

# Indiana Sen. Rodric Bray

Fast rise in leadership provides new opportunities, and challenges, for second-term senator whose roots in state politics run deep

by Ilene Grossman ([igrossman@csg.org](mailto:igrossman@csg.org))

When he first took office in the Indiana Senate, Rodric Bray expected to enjoy serving his home state and district. He went into the job with more personal experience than most — a father who had served in the same chamber (Bray succeeded him) and a grandfather who enjoyed a 24-year run in the U.S. Congress.

Yet serving as a senator has still exceeded Bray's expectations. It's a job, he says, that has become a true passion for him.

"Everyone wants to have meaningful work, and at the end of the day, or the month, you ask yourself if you have accomplished something," Bray says.

"I don't go home and think about this each day, but at the end of the session, when you are able to take a step back and see that you have done some work to make the state better, I take real satisfaction in that."

He first got elected in 2012 and moved fairly quickly into positions of leadership, first as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Subsequent departures in the Republican caucus' leadership team created opportunities for Bray; he served as majority leader in 2018 and will take on the chamber's top leadership position — Senate president pro tem — in 2019.

As he prepared for new responsibilities and challenges in the year ahead, Bray discussed his views on leadership and his legislative priorities with CSG Midwest. Here are excerpts from the interview.

**Q: What are some of the qualities and characteristics of an effective leader?**

**A:** When you see good leadership, everybody knows what that is. It is a person who listens more than speaks; is fair-handed with everyone, even with people who don't agree; and tries to be deliberative and inclusive. Also, you need to be a good communicator about where you want to go and how you want to get there.

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

**A:** A leader needs to be able to look at the big-picture items — look five, 10 years down the road. And to the extent I can, I will help guide us in that way. My style is to bring people to the table and let them have input and then build consensus. It is important to build a culture where everyone understands that when you create legislation, it is best to do your homework, talk to the groups involved and build some consensus. That will work better than just springing an idea in January for the legislative session.

**Q: With the recent election, the Indiana General Assembly is going to have new members. How important is mentoring for new legislators?**

**A:** When I was first elected, I was seated by some experienced legislators, so I could ask questions and learn about procedures on the Senate floor and about rules and decorum. We want to keep the [mentoring] program, and I have been working with a couple of senators to beef it up and put more organization to it. I think you can build a healthy, productive

## Bio-sketch of Sen. Rodric Bray

- ✓ Elected to Indiana Senate in 2012
- ✓ Will be president pro tem in 2019; served as majority floor leader in 2018
- ✓ Attorney, partner at Bray, Bray & Bray; legal counsel for Morgan County
- ✓ Bachelor's degree in history from Indiana University; juris doctorate from Valparaiso University School of Law
- ✓ He and wife, Kelly, have two sons and live in Martinsville



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culture if people learn what is expected of them.

**Q: What are some of the big issues, or the goals of your caucus, for the 2019 legislative session?**

**A:** First, pass a responsible budget that leaves Indiana in a fiscally sound condition. We also want to continue the work we have been doing in workforce development. We can't fill all the job vacancies we have, and with changing technologies, we need to continue to help workers adapt in this competitive environment. Education funding is always a big priority. It takes up 52 percent of our general fund budget.

School security and ensuring that our state agency responsible for meeting the needs of children, including those who are abused and neglected, runs well are also important. Another issue is teacher pay. The state funds schools, and the local elected school boards determine teacher salaries; in some districts the pay has lagged. We will take a look at that and see if there is anything we can do.

**Q: What are your views on working with the minority party when your party has such a large majority?**

**A:** I share this statistic when I talk to people in Indiana: Each year that I have been in the Senate, about 65 percent of the bills that get passed are passed unanimously, and about 95 percent are bipartisan. What that means is that you can count on one hand the number of bills that pass on a party-line vote. Only a few bills each year are polarizing. I am proud of that, and I want to keep it that way.

**Q: Tell us about one or two pieces of legislation you've sponsored that you're most proud of, and why.**

**A:** The first one was a highly controversial issue that dealt with police body cameras. Some

of our police departments were getting body cams, but there was a real question about what to do with the information caught on film. As you can imagine, the police deal with some highly personal issues. We wanted to make sure that we could balance openness and transparency and the public's right to know with privacy. The bill passed without a "no" vote in either chamber.

*[Editor's Note: Among other provisions, the law requires that footage be stored for 190 days; sets up a petition procedure if a person's request to see the footage is denied; and allows requesters to view the footage twice. Police also must blur out minors and witnesses.]*

The other bill reformed Indiana's civil forfeiture laws, by which law enforcement could take property used in the commission of a crime. Our law was criticized because it didn't have a lot of due process. The legislation [passed in 2018] speeds up the process for getting seized property back.

**Q: Do you have any big frustrations about the legislature or legislative process?**

**A:** It's what you would expect: Perhaps I think I have a really good idea, but 149 other people in the General Assembly also have good ideas. But part of the process is to realize that you are not the only one with a good idea and that others can add value. But it can be frustrating, because it can be a long, cumbersome process to get something from an idea to the governor's desk to sign.

**Q: What are some of the biggest challenges and opportunities for Indiana over the next 15 to 20 years?**

**A:** We have a challenge of funding local government. We do a lot of that funding with property taxes, and a couple of years ago we put a cap on property taxes, but that has created some challenges for our schools and local governments.