



## The 25 hardest working lawmakers

By Lauren Victoria Burke and Bob Cusack - 06/09/10 06:00 AM ET

Senate Finance Committee leaders Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Max Baucus (D-Mont.) are the hardest working members of Congress, according to the people who work with them on Capitol Hill — their fellow lawmakers, aides and other officials.

Financial Services Committee Chairman Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) came in third.

An array of experts answered one simple question: Who are the hardest-working lawmakers?

Most, if not all, members of Congress work hard, but the Capitol Hill community was able to winnow down the 535 members to the 25 who, more than any others, work late into the night and yet also rise early the next morning to do the people's business.

The duties of a member of Congress are varied, ranging from appearing at local parades to responding to constituent mail to remaking the nation's laws. Lawmakers, aides and officials looked beyond regular duties and point to those who are an effective advocate for their constituents and get their way legislatively. The resulting list is composed of members with patience, street smarts and fire in the belly.

The list does not include the top House and Senate leaders on both sides of the aisle, such as Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), because it is a given that leaders work hardest. Of the 25 who made it onto the list, 12 are senators and 13 serve in the House. There are 14 Democrats (including nine committee chairmen) and 11 Republicans.

**1. Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa).** "I get paid by the year, and I try to earn my money," says Grassley, who was elected to the upper chamber in 1980. The 76-year-old senator sits on four heavyweight panels: Judiciary, Finance, Agriculture and Budget.

After a three-mile jog at 5:30 a.m., Grassley arrives at the office at 7, where he continues to be one of the biggest playmakers under the Capitol dome. His work on government oversight remains consistent regardless of which party controls 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Grassley is one of only 28 senators in history to cast 10,000 votes, and he has not missed a roll call since 1993. Grassley, whom Democrats are targeting this cycle, is known for striking bipartisan deals, but he and his counterpart on the Finance Committee, Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), agreed to disagree this year on how to reform the nation's healthcare system.

**2. Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.).** Baucus, an avid runner who has spent endless hours flying around the fourth-largest state, took on the biggest challenge of his career when he pushed health reform to passage.

“I can't remember anything I've relished more,” he said.

When at home in Montana, the Finance Committee chairman holds regular "workdays" featuring him spending a full day in a blue-collar job alongside constituents. Baucus is gifted at running hearings with a no-nonsense, quick gavel. Like Grassley, Baucus believes that compromise is not a bad word.

**3. Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.).** Frank told The Hill he doesn't have much free time these days. "This is the busiest time in my life since I was the executive assistant to the mayor of Boston [Kevin White] from 1968 to 1970," Frank said. "And I'm 40 years older, so it's not as easy as it was then."

He will soon put the finishing touches on a massive financial regulatory reform bill that is expected to be signed into law. Frank has hinted he would like to end his career as a Cabinet member, but for the moment, the 70-year-old House member is clearly enjoying his time on Capitol Hill.

Unlike most players inside the Washington Beltway, Frank does not have a BlackBerry and does not do business by e-mail. To get a brief respite from the frantic pace of lawmaking, Frank shuts off his cell phone at night.

**4. Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.).** Dodd is not seeking reelection, but he is as relevant as ever. He helped pass an overhaul of health reform and is poised to do the same for financial regulatory reform.

Unlike many on this list, Dodd dealt with personal tragedies during the 111th Congress. His sister died of cancer last summer and his best friend in the upper chamber, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), died a month later. Dodd also was diagnosed with cancer, but he now says he is healthy.

In an interview with The Hill, Dodd astutely noted that few lawmakers know when to leave Congress, Dodd, 66, will depart on top of his game.

**5. Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.).** Because he is a senior leadership lawmaker, Kyl was initially excluded from this list. But an exception was made because his name kept coming up. Asked to name two or three of their hardest-working colleagues, Republicans mentioned Kyl more than any other senator.

Kyl said, "Being involved in so many big issues — it is really time-consuming." He is one of the few senators who is regularly in the Capitol on Mondays even if there are no scheduled votes, and can often be seen carrying a huge pile of briefing books, papers and binders.

"I spend all day Monday meeting with my staff preparing for the rest of the week. If I didn't do that, I'd be way behind the curve."

**6. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).** Waxman is one of the most powerful lawmakers on Capitol Hill. He spends much of his time in Washington and no one seems to mind. Soon after securing the votes for climate change legislation on the House floor, Waxman was briefly hospitalized. But he hasn't slowed down one bit. A close ally of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (D-Calif.), Waxman says, "When you do something you enjoy, you just keep moving and doing the things you need to do."

**7. Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.).** The former North Dakota Tax Commissioner is now the leading deficit hawk in the Senate Democratic Conference. Conrad knows tax and budget policy inside and out. As the chairman of Budget Committee, Conrad is at the center of every major issue and every piece of legislation emerging from Congress.

**8. Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.).** Obey, the retiring chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, is all business. No time for press conferences and silly questions from reporters. The third-longest-serving member of the House, after Reps. John Dingell (D-Mich.) and John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), is no backslapper. But you want him on your side in a conference negotiation.

**9. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).** Schumer is known for his fondness of press conferences, but he also gets the job done. With his cell phone perpetually attached to his ear, Schumer has mastered the art of being a workhorse and a show horse at the same time. The most powerful politician in the Empire State knows policy, politics, fundraising and the nuances of the legislative process. And he doesn't shy away from controversy, as evidenced by his support for former Attorney General Michael Mukasey and his vow to tackle immigration reform.

**10. (tie) Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).** It's hard to tell which one of the senators from Maine is more of a player, so they share this position. When the deals are being forged in the back room and the compromises are being struck, these two are there.

**12. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.).** The former Ways and Means Committee chairman has been in the spotlight throughout this Congress for a myriad of ethics allegations. Even with all the controversy, he has not eased up on his work schedule. Rangel arrives at his office in the Rayburn Building at 8 a.m. and departs around 10:30 p.m. every weeknight. He tries to dedicate the second half of what is usually a 15-hour day to his Harlem constituents. "Being a chairman, I can't stop being the local congressman. I work all day with legislation."

**13. Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.).** Becerra is on both the Ways and Means Committee and the Budget panel, but the hardest work he's ever done was far from the halls of Congress — "Working road construction with my dad when I was in college," Becerra recalls. "It may be busier on Capitol Hill, but hard work is what my dad did." The Los Angeles congressman has become friendly with members of the House maintenance crews. "I stay until the very wee hours, unfortunately. I have to walk out of the last open door at Longworth [House Office Building]. I have nothing to go back to at my condo, so I stay and work."

**14. Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.).** Never has the issue of "lifting the debt from future generations" been addressed with more zeal. Though the "rising star" tag has been worn out when referring to Ryan, it's also true. He is one of the best off-the-cuff speakers and possesses a stiff command of the details on the budget.

**15. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.).** The breakneck pace at which the Senate Judiciary Committee moves is due to the legislative direction of its chairman, Leahy. He deftly moved the nominations of Attorney General Eric Holder and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor through the panel. Both attracted bipartisan support on the Senate floor. Next up for Leahy: the high court nomination of Elena Kagan.

**16. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.).** The top Republican on the Ways and Means Committee said, "I believe in the Abe Lincoln quote: 'Wherever you are, be a good one.' " According to several of his colleagues, Camp is a good one — and a good example of a consistently hardworking member.

**17. Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.).** In the last five years, Jones has signed his name more than 18,000 times on both pages of a two-page letter that has been sent to more than 9,200 people. The letters go to the immediate and extended families of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I regret voting to give President Bush the authority to wage war in Iraq," said Jones, who calls signing the letters "penance" for his 2002 vote.

Jones spends 45 minutes doing the family grocery shopping in Greenville, N.C., every Saturday, but the trips often turn into listening sessions with constituents. "I never want anybody to think I don't have time to listen to them. That's a major part of this job," he said.

**18. Rep. Robert "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.).** Last Congress, Scott's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security held more hearings than the full Judiciary Committee. It's on pace to do the same in the 111th. This Congress, Scott's racked up 235 co-sponsors, including 15 Republicans, along with 250 advocating organizations, on his crime prevention legislation, the Youth Promise Act. Scott is also often mentioned as one of the smartest members, which is part of the reason several Congressional Black Caucus colleagues urged President Barack Obama to consider him for the Supreme Court.

**19. Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.).** Pence recently has found himself traveling more to carry his party's torch as chairman of the House Republican Conference, but like most members, he remains focused on his district.

The possible 2012 presidential contender said, "I think every member of Congress works a lot harder than most Americans realize. You literally have two and maybe three full-time jobs."

No work on Sunday for Pence, however. That day is reserved for "church and family," he says.

**20. Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.).** Putting holds on legislation and constantly reminding everyone how much money the federal government spends takes a lot of time and energy. Though his colleagues grumble about the time they have to spend voting on his amendments, Coburn remains effective in not only getting his point across, but using Senate rules to slow down the institution when it is quick to spend taxpayer funds.

**21. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).** Feinstein is a force in the upper chamber, and she is unafraid to say what is on her mind. If Feinstein is not on board, your bill is in trouble. Unlike many on Capitol Hill, the chairwoman of the Intelligence Committee doesn't spout off on every issue Congress is dealing with. In between briefings on terrorist threats facing the United States, Feinstein is also a major player on the Judiciary Committee.

**22. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah).** Hatch can fire up the partisan rhetoric, but he also works well with Democrats. He is one of the few Republicans on Capitol Hill who has a strong legislative bond with Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). That could hurt him, however, in his 2012 reelection race, in which he could face a primary challenge from Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah).

**23. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.).** Wasserman Schultz is a multitasker. She is the chairwoman of the Appropriations Legislative Branch subcommittee, a chief deputy whip and a member of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. On top of that, last year Wasserman Schultz went public with her battle against breast cancer — after she beat it. The first Jewish congresswoman ever elected from Florida has three children and a bright future in the Democratic Caucus.

**24. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio).** The longest-serving female member in Congress, Kaptur represents an Ohio district hit especially hard by the ailing economy. She doesn't bite her tongue when she believes her party is moving in the wrong direction.

**25. Rep. Timothy Johnson (R-Ill.).** Johnson, who is constantly on his cell phone, is usually trying to reach one of his constituents. The centrist Republican said he spends "a minimum of three and a maximum of 12 hours a day" trying to connect to his more than 650,000 constituents. He added, "We generate a huge amount of constituent service doing this — maybe 10 times the average." That also means the ring tone on his cell phone — which is "The Final Countdown" by the group Europe — is heard a lot in the hallways of the House.