

## **GOP average score tops Dems in lawmaker ratings**

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RICHMOND, VA. — Republicans in Virginia's General Assembly got higher average scores from the pro-business group Virginia FREE for 2010 votes on business legislation than Democrats.

The GOP average in the House and Senate for this year's session was 78.5 on a scale of 100. The Democrats' average was 60.

No legislator had a perfect score on the annual scorecard released Monday by the Virginia Foundation for Research and Economic Education Inc.

The highest, 89, was shared by four Republicans: Sens. Jeff McWaters and Frank Wagner of Virginia Beach and John Watkins of Powhatan, and Del. Sam Nixon, who has since left the House to work for Gov. Bob McDonnell.

The lowest, 43, was for Democratic Sen. Don McEachin of Henrico County.

Conservative independent Dels. Lacey Putney of Bedford and Watkins M. Abbitt of Appomattox had rankings of 88 and 70, respectively.

Thirty-two legislators scored below 60 in this year's rankings, and all were Democrats: 21 in the 100-member House, 11 in the 40-member Senate.

The group criticized lawmakers of both parties, accusing them of "Legislative Sleight of Hand" for claiming not to have increased taxes but eliminating a business tax deduction that manufacturers say will cost them millions and make them less competitive overseas.

"Legislators, in an effort to 'find new money' during these difficult economic times, decided to phase out this deduction. Doing that would impose a sizeable tax increase on those industries losing the deduction," the advocacy group said in a preamble to its spreadsheets grading lawmakers on several categories.

It said that eliminating the "domestic production deduction" as a way to help balance record revenue shortfalls amounted to a tax increase and noted the Virginia Manufacturers Association's forecast that it would increase business costs by \$75 million and result in 6,400 lost jobs in the state by 2012.

The organization praised Republican Gov. Bob McDonnell for restoring many of the deductions that lawmakers had cut in putting together the new state budget for the 2011 and 2012 fiscal years.

It chastised the House and Senate for failing again to enact any new funding to address acute gridlock on highways in the state's most congested regions, northern Virginia and Hampton Roads.

The report said the funding shortage for transportation needs are "conservatively estimated at \$1 billion a year."

But the report praised the legislature for bipartisan adoption of McDonnell's package of economic development incentives including funding boosts for tourism and film production promotion, an additional \$18 million for a fund McDonnell can use to entice employers to move to Virginia and an industrial megasite fund.