

# Hurry Up & Vote is Bad for Massachusetts

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Posted: July 15, 2014

*Taunton Daily Gazette, Fall River Herald News & Wicked Local*

House Speaker Bob DeLeo and his leadership team have been employing a technique for lawmaking that your middle school teacher warned you about: procrastination. For several weeks, the House has been tackling numerous pieces of significant legislation, including our state's \$36 billion budget, but giving members only a few hours to read over the final version of what they are voting on.

No one can blame lawmakers for trying to be efficient with their time, but that's not their goal. Rather, it's to push through major pieces of legislations while trying to avoid debate as much as possible.

On Sunday night, June 29, the conference committee charged with unifying the House and Senate drafts of the state budget released their version, which lawmakers were expected to vote on the next day. State Rep. Denise Andrews, D-Orange, a member of the House's liberal wing of the Democratic Party, acknowledged to the media that she didn't read the entire document, but trusted in "the process."

This, of course, is the same process that brought about the tech tax last year without any public debate or hearings and later led to an "oops" repeal a short time later.

Lawmakers need to embrace the fact that voters are not looking for more of the same, but something different. Only eight lawmakers of the 200 in the House and Senate voted against the budget and rejected the rushed process brought by the Speaker and Senate president. The eight lawmakers were state Reps. Leah Cole, R-Peabody; Geoff Diehl, R-Whitman; Shawn Dooley, R-Norfolk; Ryan Fattman, R-Webster; Marc Lombardo, R-Billerica; Jim Lyons, R-Andover; Lenny Mirra, R-West Newbury; and state Sen. Bob Hedlund, R-Weymouth.

This tactic was repeated again last week. The House Ways and Means Committee released the controversial "gun bill" on Wednesday morning, with lawmakers expected to vote on the measure that day. To make matters even worse, the legislative committee responsible for releasing the bill was not forthcoming on how lawmakers voted in committee. According to the State House News when asked for a breakdown of the vote, an aide said "it's the committee's policy not to release information about how each member of the committee votes on bills."

These tactics didn't sit well with some, including state Rep. Angelo D'Emilia, R-Bridgewater. D'Emilia offered a motion to postpone the vote on the gun bill; his motion received bipartisan support, but ultimately failed by a vote of 57-91. According to State House News Service, state Rep. David Linsky, D-Natick, argued against postponing the vote, saying, "Massachusetts has taken a more deliberative approach on the issue than other states."

While arguing for postponement, Reps. D’Emilia, Brad Hill, R-Ipswich, George Peterson, R-Grafton, and Thomas Calter, D-Kingston, said the bill was significantly different from its earlier version and lawmakers needed more time to read and understand it, as well as to hear feedback from constituents. Calter described the process as “completely unfair” and “totally wrong” to force a vote on the just-released bill on Wednesday.

Unlike the eight lawmakers who voted against the budget with only several hours to read through it, many legislators are expected to support the Speaker’s agenda and way of governing despite their objections. Some lawmakers take one step forward when they join others to delay bills and request reasonable time to read them over before voting on them but then take two steps backwards when they vote for the overall bill. It’s pretty simple: If you feel you haven’t had enough time to understand legislation, you shouldn’t vote to pass it. A principled vote for delay followed by an unprincipled vote for something you don’t understand only strengthens the power of leadership.

Lawmakers who want to stand on principle and see significant change in the legislative process must break ranks with their leadership more often. The eight who voted against the budget would welcome more company.

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