

That said, there are questions that are frequently asked about TAB that we'd like to take a few minutes to address:

1. *If the standard you apply to legislators' votes is less government vs. more government, how do you handle social issues like abortion?* Interestingly, everyone associated with Montana Conservatives and TAB is fiercely and actively pro-life. Yet for the purposes of our TAB ratings, we typically do not use recorded votes dealing with abortion or other so-called "social issues," unless there is public funding involved (which we would strongly oppose) or unconstitutional regulations (as with "gay rights.") We would also oppose government growth through the passage of so-called "hate crimes" legislation, and would always support bills advancing parental rights and school choice. But in general, abortion-related bills do not fall within the strict TAB parameters that track the size, cost and power of government.

Unfortunately, there have been irresponsible statements disseminated, charging that TAB actually rates legislators down for supporting pro-life bills! Nothing could be further from the truth, as our list of tracked bills will clearly show. Others allege that TAB is not a "true" conservative rating system because we generally leave off abortion bills. We acknowledge that there is no "perfect" rating system that takes into account the full spectrum of conservative thought, but we feel we come the closest to unifying all conservatives around those issues that mutually burn in our hearts, and will try, to the best of our abilities, to continue fulfilling that mission.

2. *Does TAB count all the bills you track equally in your ratings, or weigh some votes more heavily than others?* The TAB approach assigns one point to each bill used, with no weighting. While it's understandable why some systems treat certain key or large impact bills as "more important", we have resisted this, with the goal of developing the clearest picture possible of each legislator's "ideological compass." Bills that receive less attention (by lobbyists, party leadership and the media) are often the best indicators of a lawmaker's personal philosophy and true grasp on the proper roles of government. When no one is looking, what do their values and instincts tell them to do? For this reason, we research and use many lesser known bills for our voting survey, and count each bill as of equal value.

3. *Why does TAB use so many bills? Most voting indexes are a lot simpler, concentrating on far fewer pieces of legislation.* There are several reasons for this. First, we need to understand that most legislative scorecards and voting indexes are produced by defined interest groups – some on the left, some on the right, some (e.g. industry associations) that represent a very mixed bag of big and small government positions. TAB seeks to span all legislative subject areas and all issues of concern to conservative citizens. We are thus able to say that we have no ties to any industries, organizations or special interests. Second, rating a lawmaker on 70 or 80 recorded votes creates far greater accuracy and objectivity than judging them on 7 or 8 bills. Small vote samples create lots of anomalies and potential false scores; these are avoided by averaging together roughly ten times more votes. A legislator may complain about one or two votes used, but he or she can hardly allege "unfairness" as a whole, when looking at the voting *pattern* TAB reveals by using many votes across many issues. Finally, the extensive voting data TAB generates can be a very valuable resource, both to candidates opposing incumbent legislators and to the voting public as a whole.

4. *Why does TAB use such a high percentage of negative bills (“no” votes) in its survey, rather than trying to have a roughly equal number of good and bad bills on which to rate the legislators?* The short answer is that, unfortunately, there is a preponderance of bad bills (increasing government) introduced, and a preponderance of bad bills enacted into law – often, even with heavy Republican majorities. The tendency of lawmakers is to go to Helena and “solve problems” with government solutions. The impetus is always to grow government. Thus, an honest voting survey must attempt to use a proportional number of good and bad bills, which requires the tracking of considerably more bills that expand the power, cost and reach of government. TAB believes, however, that there is an added advantage to using a high number of “no” votes to establish conservative ratings. The truth is, in politics, it is much easier to vote “yes” (for almost everything, good or bad) than to vote “no” and get some interest group or entitlement-minded voter mad at you. “Yes” is therefore always the “safe” vote. Voting “no” generally takes more of the kind of courage and conviction that we truly need in public office. This is especially true, for example, when legislators are expected to analyze complex, 100-page agency bills (i.e., written by the agency) that may affect 30 or 40 different areas of current law. Most lawmakers automatically “trust” those who wrote the bill and vote “yes.” On the other hand, for conservatives, the axiom is “when in doubt, vote no.” TAB rewards that kind of courage, independence and legislative prudence.

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