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## State lawmakers passed fewer bills this past year

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ALBANY — New York lawmakers passed fewer bills this year than in recent sessions, particularly in the Senate, and legislators in the majority voted overwhelmingly along party lines, according to a report released Friday.

Assembly Democrats, who hold a supermajority, voted the same way as Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan, 97.4 percent of the time, the New York Public Interest Research Group found. In the Senate, lawmakers' votes matched those of President Malcolm Smith, D-Queens, 99.7 percent of the time.

All told, lawmakers introduced 15,367 pieces of legislation this year and 3,701 resolutions. Members of the Assembly introduced 8,939 bills and passed 1,242 of them, or 14 percent, while senators sponsored 6,428 bills and passed 640 of them, or 10 percent.

But the number of bills that passed both houses dropped sharply compared with recent years, in large part because Senate business was on hold for a month as Republicans and Democrats fought over leadership. Bills that made it through both houses totaled 554, down from 811 in 2008, 847 in 2007 and 958 in 2006.

"We lost the most productive time period of the legislative session because of the leadership crisis," said Austin Shafran, a spokesman for the Senate majority.

Republicans staged a leadership coup June 8, and the GOP and Democrats argued for about a month over which party controlled the chamber. After a Democrat who had sided with Republicans flipped back to his own conference July 9, Democrats regained control. Senators passed 394 bills in July, compared with none in January, 46 in April and 50 in June, the NYPIRG report said.

"The quality of the bills and the benefit to the people of New York is the only standard the Legislature should be judged by, not necessarily the quantity of the bills," Shafran said.

The Senate does not consider the legislative session to be over, he said, noting that it will take up a number of nominations and possibly an ethics reform package Sept. 10. Gov. David Paterson is calling lawmakers back into session next month to deal with New York's \$2.1 billion budget deficit.

Democratic senators introduced an average of 114 bills and got 13 of them passed, or 11 percent, and Republicans introduced 80 and passed six, or 7.5 percent, the analysis said.

Sen. Stephen Saland, R-Poughkeepsie, introduced 35 bills and four passed, compared with 59 last year, when he chaired the Education Committee.

"I'd be less than candid if I didn't say that it was disappointing," Saland said.

The senator voted with the majority 90.2 percent of the time, but many of the bills that go before the

Senate are relatively routine, technical amendments for example, he said. Some legislation that passed had been his in past sessions and was introduced by Democrats this year, he said. "So the fact that many of my colleagues, if not most or all of my colleagues, have voted for one or all of the bills certainly does not mean that there's a sense of collegiality or cohesiveness," he said.

Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, D-Yonkers, and Sen. Antoine Thompson, D-Buffalo, voted yes on every bill, the NYPIRG report said. Twelve of the 65 bills that Stewart-Cousins introduced were passed by the Senate.

Assemblyman Marcus Molinaro, R-Tivoli, Dutchess County, introduced 22 bills, and two passed. He co-sponsored a number of other bills that were moved by the Democratic majority, such as legislation for local-government consolidation.

Molinaro said his role as a minority member is to identify flaws in bills and help improve legislation introduced by Democrats.

"It's not for me about scoring points but rather about bettering the lives of the people that I represent and the state of New York as a whole," he said.

Here are some other findings in the report:

- Assembly Democrats sponsored an average of 66 bills and got 10 passed. Republicans introduced 41 bills on average and only three were passed.
- The Senate passed more than 75 percent of its bills unanimously, and the average Assembly bill had 132 yes votes, 9 no votes and 8 absences or abstentions.
- Six Assembly members, including Nancy Calhoun, R-Blooming Grove, Orange County, were most likely to vote with minority leaders. They did so between 93 percent and 94 percent of the time. Five members, including Greg Ball, R-Patterson, Putnam County, were the least likely to vote the same as GOP leaders. They did so on less than 85 percent of votes.

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