

The Grand Rapids Press

LEGISLATIVE VOTING RECORDS

Lawmakers' roll call — who showed up?



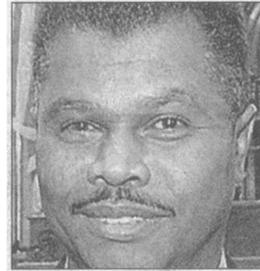
Rep. Doug Hart
missed 316 votes



Rep. Jerry Kooiman
missed 5 votes



Sen. Wayne Kuipers
missed 70 votes



Sen. Bill Hardiman
missed 1 vote



AP FILE PHOTO

Being there: Attendance is just one way to measure a legislator's effectiveness, Capitol observers say.

Those with weak records cite special circumstances

By **STEVEN HARMON**
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

With one week to go in the 2003-04 legislative session, state Rep. Doug Hart is assured of a dubious distinction: He missed the most votes among West Michigan lawmakers.

The Plainfield Township Republi-

can skipped 316 votes — third most in the House — behind two Detroit lawmakers who have missed more than 450 votes, records compiled by a conservative think-tank indicate.

Among other local highs and lows:

- State Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids, missed the fewest votes among area House members, just five.

- In the Legislature's upper chamber, state Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-

MORE

- How often West Michigan lawmakers voted. **A2**

Kentwood, missed just one vote, tied with three others. By contrast, Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, missed 70 — 12th-highest among 38 senators.

Missed votes include those where legislators were excused from attendance as well as votes where legislators were present but did not vote, according to Michiganvotes.org, a website run by the Midland-based [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#).

Hart — who leaves the Legislature at year's end because of term limits — attributed most of the missed votes to

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VOTING

VACATIONS, FAMILY MATTERS CITED

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a two-week trip to Russia to adopt a 9-month-old girl last February.

"When your number comes up, you have to go," Hart said. "When you adopt from Russia, when the baby is available, you have to appear before the court."

He also cited a vacation he scheduled before the House extended its session into late June, along with a few doctor appointments.

Of the votes Hart missed, 48 came when he was in Russia and 68 came during the vacation he took last June. That leaves 170 missed votes on other dates, including 30 on a single day last week, which would still have put him among the top 15 offenders.

"My attendance record was very good during my first five years," he said. "This year was an anomaly for me. I'm not happy about my missed votes. While I have some explanations, I'm certainly not going to try to defend myself."

In the 2001-02 legislative session, Hart missed 153 votes — 37th highest among 112 who served in that period.

Kuipers, who led West Michigan state senators in missed votes, blamed his voting record on a vacation he scheduled in July 2003. Sixty-two of the 70 votes he missed came in the July 1-3 period.

"Traditionally, we've been done at that time, so we planned a vacation to meet family members in Nevada," he said.

He received permission from Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "If he needed me, I'd be back on the next plane," Kuipers said.

A legislator's work is not necessarily reflected by the number of votes taken, said Craig Ruff, of the Lansing think-tank Public Sector Consultants.

"It's an artificial way of measuring legislative effectiveness," Ruff said. "But it is one factor constituents might use in measuring their impact."

Hardiman, of Kentwood, credited his near spotless record to a mild obsession.

Once he realized he had a perfect streak last year. "I was

BY THE NUMBERS

Missed votes in 2003-04 session

The number of votes local lawmakers missed, followed by their rank, from worst to best:

House (110 members)

Rep. Doug Hart, R-Plainfield Township: 316 (3rd)
Rep. Fulton Sheen, R-Plainwell: 116 (21st)
Rep. James Koetje, R-Walker: 108 (23rd)
Rep. Barbara VanderVeen, R-Allendale: 92 (30th)
Rep. Bill Huizenga, R-Zeeland: 73 (43rd)
Rep. Glenn Steil, R-Cascade Twp: 51 (48th, tied)
Rep. Mike Pumford, R-Newaygo: 51 (48th, tied)
Rep. Bill Van Regenmorter, R-Georgetown Township: 40 (56th, tied)
Rep. Gary Newell, R-Saranac: 28 (70th, tied)
Rep. Joanne Voorhees, R-Wyoming: 13 (85th, tied)
Rep. Judy Emmons, R-Sheridan: 13 (85th, tied)
Rep. Michael Sak, R-Grand Rapids: 9 (95th)
Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids: 5 (100th, tied)

Senate (38 members)

Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland: 70 (12th)
Sen. Patricia Birkholz, R-Saugatuck: 15 (20th)
Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt: 14 (22nd)
Sen. Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming: 9 (23rd)
Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood: 1 (38th, tied)

compulsive enough to make sure I didn't miss one.

The one he missed — last week — was not his fault, Hardiman said.

"I was right there, I pushed the button and it didn't register. I hate to not be at 100 percent. I'm going to call the Secretary of the Senate to see if I can get it corrected. I enjoyed having that 100 percent record."

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