



## New house reps horded into basement bullpen

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Statehouse News Service

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Geoff Diehl recommends this. [Undo](#)



Boston — They campaigned across their districts for months, battled over state issues, and told voters they were the best suited to represent their communities on Beacon Hill. Last Wednesday they were sworn in during a bustling session that drew headlines statewide.

Now, they sit, huddled together with aides and computers in a pair of expansive but relatively quiet rooms in the basement of the state capitol, awaiting committee assignments and word from legislative leaders about a short-term session agenda.

Thirty-nine new House members, organized in desks alphabetically, have been assigned to "the bullpen," where they sit elbow to elbow and aide to aide, getting to know one another and their way around the building.

Rep. Don Wong (R-Saugus) said he is enjoying meeting all the other new representatives and their aides.

"Now I know why they call it the bullpen. We are trying to trade aides," Wong said, laughing and looking at his aide. "We are looking at other people's aides, to see what they got."

This year, because the freshmen class is so large, state officials were forced to move the bullpen from Room 437 on the fourth floor to two hearing rooms in the basement, Rooms B-1 and B-2. Unlike incoming senators who are temporarily afforded the office space of their predecessors, the new reps could be holed up in the basement rooms for four to eight weeks before they are assigned permanent quarters.

Wong, owner of the Kowloon restaurant in Saugus, said sitting in the bullpen feels like being in school again, a bit like a college dorm. Many new legislators are craving Kowloon food, and wondering when he is planning to bring it in for his new colleagues, he said. Wong was non-committal. "We'll see," he said.

Some legislators, like college freshmen, have started storing food in the room.

Rep. Geoffrey Diehl (R-Whitman) missed lunch all last week, so he now keeps a secret stash of food in the room — to share with everyone, of course, he said.

Diehl said the close quarters foster friendships and will create good working relationships for the future.

Diehl also said the tight arrangements have not been too bad because people's hours seem to be staggered. "It hasn't been shoulder to shoulder yet," Diehl said. "But I imagine we will soon be fighting for our printouts."

Rep. Tackey Chan (D-Quincy), who served as legal counsel to Sen. Michael Morrissey for 12 years, said the bullpen is luxurious compared to other places he has worked in at the State House.

"I worked with Michael Morrissey back when he was banished by Bulger in a fifth floor attic" office, he said. "That is how I broke into the State House. My first three months were spent in Room 511, with five people sitting half a foot from each other. This is spacious. I have been in worse places," Chan said.

Rep. Gailanne Cariddi (D-North Adams) said working in the bullpen is "hectic."

"It is crazy. It is the best atmosphere to learn the ropes," she said. "I think we will manage here."

Cariddi, who commutes three hours from North Adams, joked that she gets to the State House early so no one will steal her seat.

Rep. Mark Cusack, (D-Braintree) said the atmosphere is like a campaign.

"It reminds me of a phone bank of a campaign, and I am used to that," Cusack said. "As long as I have a computer and a phone, I am ready to go."

Some senior legislators shared fond memories of their days in the bullpen.

Speaker Robert DeLeo said he came to the State House in 1991 with a large freshman class, 40 people, and they were jammed in a single room.

"You are coming off a tough campaign, and you feel like 'I was just elected as a state representative. Here, I am.' You are at the top of the world," DeLeo said. "Then they put you in an office with just a little bit of a desk, and your aide sits in a chair behind you without anything. So reality hits that you are a freshman member of the Legislature."

DeLeo said if freshman legislators think the bullpen is humbling, wait until they get their offices.

"My first office, I got an office without any windows, and in the summertime it was so stifling hot. All I had room was for a desk, a chair, and another chair," DeLeo said. "I think about that as I move along now."

Assistant Minority Leader George Peterson, (R-Grafton) said he still carries a memento of his early days. Artists from the Massachusetts College of Art painted portraits of a few freshmen legislators. Peterson still has his. He also remembers the first senior legislator to introduce herself to him, Rep. Marie Parente.

"She was teaching me to dial out of the State House on the phones," Peterson said.

Rep. Vincent Pedone (D-Worcester) said he too was part of a big rookie class back in 1993.

"The best part of having to be in the bullpen is you develop relationships and bonds with people that are brand new as well," Pedone said. "The downside is there is absolutely no privacy."

Laughing, Pedone said he thinks freshman legislators should have to stay in the bullpen for a year.

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