

# MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

58th Annual Meeting Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Fall 2003



Vernon Smith, one of the nation's pre-eminent experts on state Medicaid programs, addresses attendees at this year's Midwest Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. Smith, a principal with Health Management Associates, discussed trends in Medicaid expenditure growth and state efforts to control health care spending.

## Plenty of good ideas to take home

### *MLC meeting attendees examine key policy issues*

Close to 600 people traveled to Milwaukee this summer to take part in the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Midwest Legislative Conference, where lawmakers from around the region were able to share innovative ideas in state government and take many new ones home with them.

The four-day event began with meetings of the MLC's various committees and ended with a speech by presidential historian Michael Beschloss. In between, state legislators heard from leading public policy experts, participated in roundtable discussions with peers from the region, and learned lessons on political leadership and health care from renowned national speakers.

"The seminars were very informative, and the opportunity to discuss issues with other legislators is priceless," Minnesota Rep. Laura Brod said of this year's meeting.

Beschloss' remarks culminated this year's meeting. He shared stories of courageous presidential leadership during times of crisis, from the decisions that Truman made at the beginning of the Cold War to those that Reagan made at the end of it.

***"The opportunity to discuss issues with other legislators is priceless."*** Rep. Laura Brod, Minnesota

In those cases and others, Beschloss said, presidents have risked their own political futures for the good of the country. Likewise, legislators are now having to make unpopular choices as they try to get their states out of this current fiscal crisis.

"There may be a moment in your career that forces you to make tough decisions that end your career, but that are good for the state," Beschloss told lawmakers. History, he said, looks favorably on the nation's politicians who are willing to make that kind of sacrifice.

The budget crisis was a recurring topic throughout the conference. During a fiscal leaders' roundtable discussion, policymakers contrasted the budget problems in different states and compared how legislators decided to balance state budgets. In addition, attendees heard a regional economic forecast from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

The rising cost of Medicaid also was examined in-depth, as national expert Vernon Smith provided MLC attendees with an overview of some of the root causes of the increases along with examples of how states have tried to address them.

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# Lawmakers approve 10 resolutions at meeting

At their Annual Meeting, members of the Midwestern Legislative Conference approved 10 resolutions that dealt with several different public policy issues. Copies of the policy statements have been sent to President George Bush, members of the U.S. Congress, and other key government officials and organizations.

The resolutions process is one of the principal ways that the MLC involves its members. All legislators are invited to submit proposals, which are then sent to the Resolutions Committee for consideration. Iowa Rep. Libby Jacobs served as chair of this year's Resolutions Committee. One of the approved resolutions recognized the efforts of the state of Wisconsin in putting together this year's meeting.

The following is a list of the other approved resolutions along with the committee or individual sponsor. To obtain a copy of the resolutions, contact Ilene Grossman at 630/810-0210 or [igrossman@csg.org](mailto:igrossman@csg.org).

## **The American Passenger Rail Agreement**

*Sponsor: Nebraska Sen. DiAnna Schimek, on behalf of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission*

## **Establishment of a Great Lakes Legislative Caucus**

*Sponsor: Michigan Sen. Patricia Birkholz*

## **State Efforts to Enhance P-16 Education**

*Sponsor: Economic Development, Technology and Labor Committee*

## **No Child Left Behind Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

*Sponsor: Education Committee*

## **Chronic Illness and Disease Management**

*Sponsor: Health and Human Services Committee*

## **Medicaid Modernization**

*Sponsor: Health and Human Services Committee*

## **Rapid Reintegration of the North American Beef Industry**

*Sponsor: Midwest-Canada Relations Committee*

## **Development of a Comprehensive Transportation Plan for Shipments of Spent Nuclear Fuel to Yucca Mountain**

*Sponsor: Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee*

## **Full-Scale Testing of Shipping Casks for Spent Nuclear Fuel**

*Sponsor: Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee*

## Iowa, Ohio programs win CSG Innovations Awards

An Iowa program that encourages young people to develop solutions for environmental challenges in the state and an Ohio initiative that helps businesses comply with various state requirements won Innovations Awards at this year's Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

The two winners were among the 10 Midwestern state programs that were finalists in this year's Council of State Governments' Innovations Awards program. The MLC Innovations Selection Committee, which is composed of legislators from throughout the Midwest, chose this region's two winners. Iowa's Pollution Prevention (P2) Intern Program places college graduate and upper-level undergraduate students in Iowa's businesses, industries and governmental agencies for a 12-week period to help identify, evaluate and implement ecological and economic solutions for specific environmental issues or problems. The Ohio Business Gateway program is a Web-based filing and payment system that allows business taxpayers to file and pay various state-level taxes and fees to different state agencies at one Web site for free.



South Dakota Reps. Orville Smidt and Jim Hundstad take time to talk during a break in sessions at this year's Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting in Milwaukee. Legislators from each of the MLC's 11 member states and affiliates Ontario and Saskatchewan attended the four-day event. In all, nearly 600 people participated in the meeting.

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Some key environmental issues were the focus of the meeting's Tuesday morning policy sessions. Lawmakers heard ideas on how to curb nonpoint source pollution in rural areas and work collaboratively to protect the Great Lakes. Other sessions examined potential future power sources for the region, including clean coal, wind and nuclear energy, and ethanol and biodiesel fuel.



Presidential historian Michael Beschloss addresses the MLC.

The meeting also included discussions on education reform, state policies on immigrants and the children of undocumented workers, transportation funding, the

changing nature of state-federal relations, and animal health and agriculture emergencies.

This year's conference featured two luncheon speakers. NBC News Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski discussed the U.S. role in global politics in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Dr. Zorba Paster, host of the National Public Radio program "Zorba Paster On Your Health," shared ways that legislators can stay healthy and reduce stress despite their demanding jobs.

Legislators had time to enjoy some of the many attractions that Wisconsin's largest city has to offer as well. During a day trip to Miller Park, attendees learned about the financing and construction of the Milwaukee Brewers' new stadium. Evening social activities included visits to the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Milwaukee Public Museum. Children and spouses had the chance to go to the zoo, take a boating trip on Lake Michigan and visit Old World Wisconsin, an outdoor history museum.

Plans already have begun for the 2004 MLC Annual Meeting, which will be held July 11-14 in Des Moines, Iowa.

## Legislators share ideas, solutions at morning Table Topics

Table Topics, small group discussions held during the Monday and Tuesday breakfasts of the MLC Annual Meeting, are popular forums for legislators to share ideas on a particular public policy problem. Any legislator who attends the meeting is welcome to facilitate a discussion on an issue of his or her choosing. This year, 11 Table Topics discussions were held.

- South Dakota Sen. Frank Kloucek led a discussion on some of the issues related to country-of-origin labeling.
- Iowa Rep. Gene Manternach shared ideas on various livestock confinement issues from his perspective as a producer.
- Iowa Sen. John Kibbie discussed with lawmakers how their states are dealing with issues related to public pension funding.
- Minnesota Rep. Eric Lipman shared his thoughts and solicited the ideas of others concerning the recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings on race-based admissions at state universities.
- Wisconsin Rep. Mark Miller offered examples of how state lawmakers can access reliable, useful information that helps them make informed decisions on issues of critical concern to their respective states.
- Kibbie and Kloucek facilitated a discussion on the impact that confined animal feeding operations and corporate farming are having on the rural Midwest's environment and economy.
- D. Wayne Elhard, a member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, discussed the problems associated with the American border closure to Canadian beef imports, along with ways that leaders can develop workable solutions.
- Wisconsin Rep. Kitty Rhoades reviewed with fellow lawmakers the many challenges states face in trying to redesign their long-term care/medical assistance programs.
- Iowa Rep. John Connors facilitated a discussion on legislative ethics and gift laws, using his own state's experience with the issue as an example.
- Illinois Rep. Karen May led a roundtable discussion that focused on state efforts to help small businesses obtain affordable health insurance for their employees.
- Wisconsin Sen. Carol Roessler organized a Table Topic that looked at state attempts to improve the nursing home survey process.

# Iowa making plans to host 2004 MLC meeting

Visitors might be surprised next year when they arrive in Des Moines, Iowa, for the MLC's 2004 Annual Meeting. While



Incoming MLC chair  
Rep. Libby Jacobs  
of Iowa

Iowa's capital city still has plenty of reminders of the state's agricultural tradition, it also has been undergoing a transformation of sorts.

About \$1.5 billion has been invested in various ongoing construction projects in the downtown area alone, and throughout Des Moines, there are signs of economic growth and revitalization. Not surprisingly, then, planners of next year's meeting are looking forward to sharing all of the

changes with their Midwestern neighbors. The meeting's social activities and site visits will celebrate the city's past, present and future.

Lawmakers also can look forward to discussions on how the Midwest can remain economically competitive and vibrant in the years and decades ahead.

"Attendees will hear from speakers who will challenge their creativity and give them an opportunity to explore ways of bringing even more economic development to the entire region," says Midwestern Legislative Conference incoming chair Rep. Libby Jacobs of West Des Moines. "And, of course, legislators will be able to exchange new ideas with their peers."

Like past conferences, next year's meeting will feature numerous public policy sessions that focus on key issues of concern to the Midwest.

"The MLC meeting is unique because it allows lawmakers to look at problems affecting this region," Jacobs says. "We also discuss possible solutions with each other and learn about important resources and contacts available to us. Plus, the meetings showcase some of our great Midwestern cities. We certainly plan on doing that in Des Moines."

The MLC Annual Meeting will be held July 11-14. For more information, contact the Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments at 630/810-0210.

Join us next year!  
July 11-14, 2004  
Des, Moines, Iowa

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