



Rep. Dan Forestal

Rep. David Ober

# A voice for millennials

## Lawmakers strive to make state more responsive to needs of their generation, and get young people interested in public service

by Indiana Reps. Dan Forestal (h100@in.gov) and David Ober (h82@in.gov)

When we both became members of the Indiana House of Representatives in 2012, it might seem to the outsider that we were polar opposites.

One of us is a lifelong Republican representing a primarily rural district in the northeast corner of Indiana. The other is a staunch Democrat who serves the heart of our state's largest city, Indianapolis.

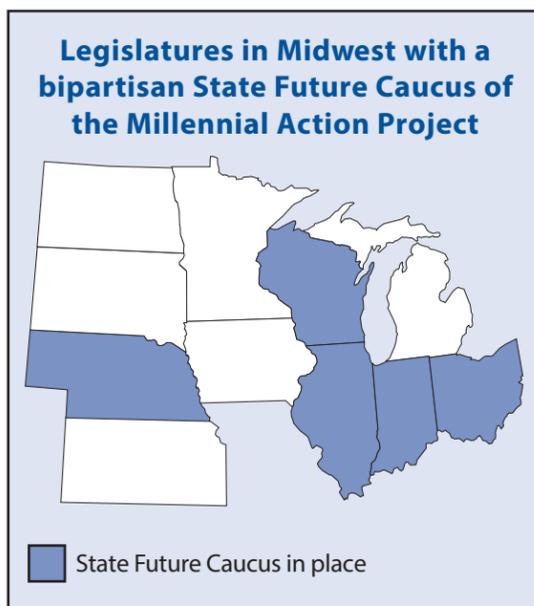
But both of us were driven to run for office through a commitment to public service instilled in us by our parents and other role models, as well as a desire to see that people of our age — the so-called millennials — take a more active role in government.

Over the past four years, we have moved into leadership positions within our respective caucuses. (Rep. Ober serves as the chairman of the House Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications Committee for the House Republicans, while Rep. Forestal is the assistant whip for the House Democrats and the caucus spokesman on transportation issues.)

Our work has demonstrated that there can be a place in government for younger people driven by a willingness to serve, as well as a desire to see the legislative process serve all people, not just the elite.

The question then became how to translate that interest to others, and that's when we became involved in the Millennial Action Project's Future Caucus Network. Earlier this year, the two of us — joined by some like-minded colleagues — announced the formation of the Indiana Future Caucus, making ours the 17th state to join the MAP network.

So our group has been formed. The question now becomes, how does the Indiana Future Caucus become an active player in future sessions of the Indiana General Assembly?



First, while the tendency is to believe that our legislature is riddled with partisan politics, the simple fact is that the vast majority of issues before us are resolved in a strong bipartisan fashion. We do disagree, but many times there is common ground for agreement. The question is to find those issues that are of concern, then acting upon common solutions.

Second, legislative agendas are beginning to take on new challenges that reflect the changes we face within society itself. Just a few years ago, no one would have even thought that lawmakers would be considering the need for regulation of the types of services such as those offered by Uber or Airbnb, yet it has dominated recent sessions in legislatures across the country. As these types of services evolve, so will the need for constant re-evaluation of government's role in determining how we protect the public's best interests.

In Indiana, we have just embarked on a two-year study of our state's laws covering the sale of alcohol. Some of the laws governing this area have been on the books for more than a century, yet legislators have come to the realization that doing nothing simply does not pass muster any more. We are compelled to act to reflect upon the times in which we live. Business as usual simply will not work.

Finally, we are smack in the middle of a technological revolution that is completely changing the way that we interact with our constituents and the media. Yes, many of us still issue press releases, but we are finding that Facebook and Twitter have become the easiest means to tell the people we represent about the things that are taking place in the Indiana Statehouse.

When we choose to conduct town meetings or small chats at the local coffee shop, our constituents find out about them much faster through social media than waiting to read a release in the local paper ... if it makes it there at all.

For millennials, these tools are essential parts of our daily lives. They are as vital to us as pencils and paper, or typewriters or word processors, were to earlier generations. It makes sense for those of

We are smack in the middle of a technological revolution that is completely changing the way that we interact with our constituents.

us who have grown up with social media to serve as guideposts to show others how it can be used to expand the ideas of constituent service.

Since the Indiana Future Caucus is still in its earliest stages, our plans for becoming a critical voice in the Indiana General Assembly will seem modest at first.

We suspect those plans will include defining issues that have resonance with our age group and advocating for them throughout the 2018 session. It will be critical to offer a united, bipartisan front in advancing these proposals before our colleagues. In this way, we can show that we are not simply attempting to play politics as usual.

And the benefits of such an approach will become obvious to the people we most want to reach with our message.

We will be able to show young people that government isn't an unthinking monolith that doesn't care about the issues that concern them. Rather, there is a chance to have a voice in determining the policies that help guide your daily lives.

Through the Indiana Future Caucus, we can show that there is a chance to make a difference. By providing an example for people to follow, we can make it easier for them to take the plunge into public service for themselves.

Watch us. Let us show you it can work. From there, it is as simple as this: Join us in making a difference. ★

Reps. Dan Forestal and David Ober have been members of the Indiana House since first being elected in 2012.

Representation of millennials in Midwestern states' adult populations and legislatures (2015)		
State	% of state's adult population	% of state legislators
Illinois	31%	5%
Indiana	30%	5%
Iowa	30%	5%
Kansas	32%	7%
Michigan	28%	10%
Minnesota	30%	4%
Nebraska	31%	16%
North Dakota	34%	10%
Ohio	29%	8%
South Dakota	31%	10%
Wisconsin	29%	11%

Source: "Who We Elect: The Demographics of State Legislatures" (National Conference of State Legislatures and the Pew Charitable Trusts)

### Submissions welcome

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. The opinions expressed on this page do not reflect those of The Council of State Governments or the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Responses to any FirstPerson article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csg.org.