The 2019 class of BILLD fellows gathered in Minneapolis in August for five days of rigorous training to improve their leadership and policymaking skills.

This year’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development included participation from 36 legislators from 11 Midwestern states and three Canadian provinces. Now in its 25th year, BILLD has trained more than 875 lawmakers from the Midwest. Many graduates have gone on to hold high-ranking leadership positions in their legislatures, as well as serve in executive agencies, statewide offices, the U.S. Congress and the judiciary.

Designed for legislators in their first four years of service, the highly interactive curriculum includes a series of leadership-training courses, policy seminars and professional development workshops.

The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference conducts the annual program in partnership with the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. This collaboration allows the institute to tap into the expertise of top scholars in a variety of policy areas. This year’s BILLD fellows explored policy sessions on the economy and workforce, cybersecurity, Midwest-Canada trade relations and health care. The institute’s faculty also includes professional development experts and legislative leaders from the Midwest who lead seminars in areas such as:

- consensus building and negotiation,
- communication and speechmaking,
- time and focus management,
- effective lawmaking, and
- civil discourse

Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman, South Dakota Senate Assistant Majority Leader Jim Bolin and Michigan House Minority Leader Christine Greg discuss strategies for becoming effective legislators and leaders at a session of this year’s BILLD program.

36 legislators complete leadership training

During South Dakota’s 2019 legislative session, Rep. Jamie Smith (BILLD class of 2017) was selected to serve as House minority leader. The Democrat from Sioux Falls was first elected to the House in 2016. Smith also serves on the House Health and Human Services, State Affairs, Legislative Procedure, and Joint Legislative Procedure committees.

He is joined by two other BILLD fellows who serve as leaders of the House minority caucus: minority whips Rep. Orin Lesmeister (class of 2018) and Rep. Erin Healy (class of 2019). In the South Dakota Senate, Sen. Jim Bolin (BILLD class of 2012) currently serves as assistant majority leader. The Republican from Canton was first elected to the Senate in 2016, after having served in the House for eight years. Bolin also is vice chair of the Senate Retirement Laws Committee.

Sen. Reynold Nesiba (class of 2018) also serves in leadership in the South Dakota Senate, as minority whip.

In August, several BILLD alumni took part in the 2019 Toll Fellowship Program — a national leadership program conducted by The Council of State Governments.

- Indiana Sen. Mike Crider (class of 2015)
- Nebraska Sen. Tony Vargas (class of 2017)

Please submit Alumni News to Laura Tomaka, CSG Midwest program manager for BILLD. She can be reached at ltomaka@csg.org.

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