News Release

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Annual Meeting Brings New Leaders, Major Changes to Caucus of Great Lakes Legislators

LOMBARD, IL — During its Annual Meeting on September 22, the binational, nonpartisan Great Lakes Legislative Caucus took major steps forward by electing new leaders, adopting a policy agenda, and voting to change the organization’s name, among other developments.

The members assembled in Erie, Penn., elected Indiana Senator Ed Charbonneau to lead the Caucus as Chair in 2019-2020. Senator Charbonneau will succeed Michigan Senator Darwin Booher, whose legislative term will end in December. Illinois Representative Robyn Gabel was elected to the position of Vice Chair.

The Caucus also elected members to serve in 2019-2020 on the GLLC Executive Committee. All 10 jurisdictions are represented on the committee, which directs the GLLC’s activities.

The policy agenda adopted by the Caucus will focus the organization’s work over the next four years. The areas of focus in 2019-2022 will be water consumption, aquatic invasive species, toxic substances, nutrient pollution, and coastal communities. Some of the specific objectives include assuring the availability of safe, clean, affordable drinking water; encouraging infrastructure improvements to reduce nutrient runoff, including the installation of green infrastructure; and supporting the sustainable economic development of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence coastal communities, including the restoration and preservation of habitat.

To better reflect the binational nature of the Caucus, GLLC members voted to rename the organization the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus, a change that takes effect immediately. The Caucus will retain “GLLC” as its acronym.

Also in Erie, the Caucus wrapped up the pilot of its first Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Policy Institute. The purpose of the policy institute is to bring together a select group of GLLC members to examine a single issue and create a plan for region-wide action to address the issue by coordinating on new policies. The focus for this year’s pilot institute was the elimination of lead as a contaminant in drinking water.

Members adopted a resolution committing the Caucus to “collaborate regionally on policy measures in the Great Lakes.
states and provinces to reduce lead in drinking water in order to reduce the population’s exposure to and contamination from lead.” In 2019, the Caucus intends to host a policy institute on nutrient pollution. To honor the GLLC’s founder, the late Senator Patty Birkholz of Michigan, the Caucus also passed a resolution formally adopting a name for future institutes: “The Patricia Birkholz Institute for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Policy.”

Other resolutions passed at the annual meeting included support for binational efforts to reduce phosphorus runoff, support for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ efforts to prevent Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, and opposition to the construction of a nuclear waste repository in the Great Lakes Basin. The Caucus also honored Senator Booher for his service to the GLLC.

The mission of the GLLC is to take the best science-based recommendations out of studies and put them into practice in the eight states and two provinces that share the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Through its mix of programming, advocacy, and other activities, the Caucus provides a forum for the regional exchange of ideas and information on key issues that impact the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Membership in the nonpartisan caucus is open to all state and provincial legislators in the eight states and two provinces that share the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin.

In recent years, the Caucus has pushed for federal funding of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, an improved Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and an expedited timeline for a federal study recommending how to keep Asian carp from entering the lakes via the Chicago Area Waterway System. GLLC members were also at the forefront of a region-wide push to ban plastic microbeads in personal care products at the state and provincial level.

The Council of State Governments Midwestern Office supports and provides staffing services for the Caucus, which is funded in part by a grant from the Joyce Foundation. CSG is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association serving all three branches of state government. As part of its services for GLLC members, CSG Midwest maintains a legislative tracker, available at www.greatlakeslegislators.org, that monitors bills being considered in state and provincial capitol.

For more information about the Caucus or the 2018 Annual Meeting, please contact Lisa Janairo at ljanairo@csg.org or 920.458.5910, or visit www.greatlakeslegislators.org.