NINE MIDWEST GOVERNORS GAVE STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY; HERE IS ONE POLICY IDEA FROM EACH OF THEM

1. **ILLINOIS GOV. PRITZKER: ETHICS REFORM NEEDED TO RESTORE TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker is pressing legislators in 2020 to enact "real, lasting ethics reform." Along with singling out the need for stronger laws that prevent conflicts of interest, Pritzker said in his State of the State address that Illinois needs a "revolving door" law — a ban on legislators lobbying immediately after leaving office.

Eight Midwestern states have such prohibitions in place (see map), according to Public Citizen, a nonprofit, consumer-advocacy group.

2. **INDIANA GOV. HOLCOMB: NEW ADOPTION UNIT WILL HELP KIDS FIND PERMANENT HOMES**

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb announced plans to create a special unit within state government with a sole mission: find permanent homes for the children of parents whose rights have been terminated. According to Holcomb, 1,400 children in the state are currently available for adoption.

The new unit will be part of the Department of Child Services (DCS). Holcomb also told legislators that the state will reduce the time it takes to adopt a child to under one year.

3. **IOWA GOV. REYNOLDS CALLS FOR TAX SWAP — HIGHER SALES TAX, LOWER INCOME TAX**

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds wants to raise the state’s sales tax rate by 1 cent, a move that she says would meet several objectives: more money for water quality, a dedicated source of state funding for Iowa’s regionally based mental health system, and reductions in income and property taxes. "Any increase in revenue from a sales tax must be more than offset by additional tax cuts," Reynolds said in her Condition of the State address.

Under a constitutional amendment passed by Iowa voters in 2010, part of the revenue from any sales-tax increase (three-eighths of 1 cent) must go to a natural resources and outdoor recreation trust fund. Reynolds wants most money in that fund to go to water quality-related initiatives.

4. **IN KANSAS, A PUSH FOR MEDICAID EXPANSION, HELP FOR RURAL HOSPITALS**

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly unveiled a bipartisan agreement in January to expand Medicaid eligibility to more low-income residents. "We are so close; let’s get this done," Kelly said in her State of the State address to legislators. The expansion would be funded by a surcharge on hospitals; it includes a work-referral program for beneficiaries and a requirement that the expansion population pay a monthly premium.

The agreement also contains other health policies, including additional support for the state’s struggling rural hospitals. As of mid-February, it was unclear whether the plan would pass the Legislature. Eight Midwestern states (all but Kansas, South Dakota and Wisconsin) have adopted Medicaid expansions in recent years.

5. **MICHIGAN GOV. WHITMER SEEKS MORE HELP FOR FAMILIES AS READING LAW TAKES EFFECT**

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is establishing new public-private partnerships to help families navigate a state law that will keep students from advancing to fourth grade if they are reading below grade level. Some flexibility was built into this retention mandate: families and educators can seek exemptions, and Whitmer wants to make sure this option is known among parents whose students are at a higher risk of being retained. Michigan’s new budget, meanwhile, is investing more dollars in literacy coaches to improve reading instruction.

6. **NEBRASKA GOV. RICKETTS UNVEILS $16 MILLION PLAN FOR CAREER-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS**

Gov. Pete Ricketts said his state must do more to "connect the next generation of Nebraskans with great careers." His policy idea: offer $16 million in scholarships to help Nebraska colleges attract students pursuing careers in math, engineering, health care or computer information systems. Recipients would take part in a Nebraska-based internship or apprenticeship, and the state would track program outcomes — for example, how many scholarship graduates become employed by Nebraska businesses.

7. **NORTH DAKOTA COUNCIL AIDS TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION ON EDUCATION POLICY**

North Dakota legislative sessions are only held in odd-numbered years, but Gov. Doug Burgum still delivered a State of the State address in early 2020. In it, he singled out last year’s passage of SB 2215, which established a K-12 Education Coordinating Council.

That 18-member council, Burgum said, is now bringing "everybody together in one room" — teachers, legislators, school administrators, school board members, the state executive branch, etc. — to identify opportunities for greater cooperation, review the delivery of education services and recommend policy changes. "(It) puts us ahead of almost every other state," he said.

8. **SOUTH DAKOTA GOV. NOEM CALLS FOR NEW INVESTMENTS IN RURAL BROADBAND**

In her State of the State address, Gov. Kristi Noem said South Dakota needs to make sure that its residents "aren’t forced to choose between the modern economy on the one hand, and life in their hometowns on the other." With that in mind, she stressed the importance of finding policies that bring high-speed internet to "even the most remote" communities.

Last year, the Legislature approved a $5 million plan to launch Connect South Dakota, a grant program that connected 4,800 households to broadband; Noem asked lawmakers to approve another $5 million in 2020.

9. **WISCONSIN GOV. EVERS PROPOSES EXPANSION OF FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Gov. Tony Evers focused much of his State of the State address on ways to help Wisconsin’s agriculture industry, noting that the state had lost one-third of its dairy farms between 2011 and 2018 and leads the nation in farm bankruptcies. His mix of strategies includes helping build direct, local markets for the dairy products and other foods made by Wisconsin farmers. Evers is proposing state grants to expand farm-to-school programs and start a new "farm to fork" initiative. The goal: Get more locally produced food into the cafeterias of schools, hospitals and businesses.