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Looking for breakthrough energy policies? Look to the states

Michigan and Illinois laws cited in former governor’s presentation to Midwestern Legislative Conference by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

F or policymakers interested in getting innovative energy bills signed into law, the nation’s capital is the last place to be, a former U.S. governor told the Midwest’s legislators in July.  

Instead, he said, go to Springfield, Lansing or the many other state capitals where policy breakthroughs have occurred.  

“We haven’t had comprehensive federal legislation since 2007, so what do we do? We turn to the states,” said Bill Ritter, now the director of Colorado State University’s Center for the New Energy Economy.  

At any given time, Ritter noted during a session of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, his center is tracking up to 4,500 state-level energy bills. Legislatures not only are brimming with new ideas, he added, but they remain a place where compromises can be forged — across party lines and among competing stakeholder groups.  

“There may be partisanship at the state level, but it is oftentimes not intractable,” Ritter said. “It's not the kind of partisanship where conversations break down.”  

Michigan and Illinois provide two cases in point.  

Lawmakers there successfully built support for measures (SB 437 and 438 in Michigan, and SB 2814 in Illinois) that are now viewed as cornerstones of the two states’ energy futures.  

The two-bill legislative package in Michigan passed with large majorities in the House and Senate, tackling tricky policies related to electric choice, distributed generation and renewable power.  

As a result of that 2016 law, each of Michigan’s electric utilities must have a plan (subject to approval by the Public Service Commission) that forecasts its coverage areas’ long-term demands for electricity and that details how these needs will be met.  

These integrated resource plans also must show how the utility will reach the Michigan Legislature’s new clean energy goal: to meet at least 35 percent of the state’s electricity needs through a combination of energy efficiency and renewable energy.  

Lawmakers included new financial incentives and cost-recovery mechanisms to help utilities meet these objectives. For example, savings from energy efficiency are shared by Michigan ratepayers and utilities, and the better the performance of the utility (in terms of energy savings), the greater the level of the state incentive.  

Illinois’ SB 2814 needed support from the Democrat-controlled General Assembly and Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner. As part of the final measure, signed into law in late 2016, lawmakers included money (via a customer rate hike) to keep existing nuclear power plants from closing. That provision got the most public attention at the time of the bill’s enactment, but other parts of SB 2814 have been getting more attention as of late.  

In particular, the Future Energy Jobs Act has been credited for a recent spike in Illinois’ homegrown renewable energy projects. This is due to a reworking of the state’s renewable energy standard (25 percent by 2025 for investor-owned utilities) that provides more funding and incentives that provides more funding and incentives

About this special edition of Stateline Midwest  
This edition of Stateline Midwest provides coverage on the sessions and committee meetings held during this summer’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.  

With staff support from The Council of State Governments, the MLC holds the largest gathering of the region’s state and provincial legislators. The province of Manitoba hosted this year’s four-day event in its capital city of Winnipeg.  

CSG Midwest thanks the host province, along with the legislators, their guests, meeting speakers and contributors who took part in the MLC Annual Meeting.  

The MLC is a nonpartisan group of all legislators from 11 Midwestern states and four affiliated Canadian provinces. It has met every year since 1945. Next year’s MLC Annual Meeting will be held July 21-24 in Chicago.

“There may be partisanship at the state level, but it is oftentimes not intractable.”  
Bill Ritter, director of the Center for the New Energy Economy

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Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Guns and kids: States split on child-access prevention laws

As lawmakers seek to cope with a rising tide of gun violence while preventing accidental firearm-related injuries and deaths, Ohio could become the next Midwestern state to focus on keeping guns out of the hands of kids — that is, if a measure currently pending in the state Senate should advance.

In a roundtable discussion during the July meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, Ohio Sen. Vernan Sykes described the proposed Child Gun Safety Act (SB 279), which he and Sen. Charleta Tavares jointly introduced earlier this year.

As Sykes explained to the MLC committee, the proposal would impose criminal liability on adults who fail to safely store their guns and keep them from being accessed by minors. The bill received an initial hearing in June before an Ohio Senate committee.

Similar measures — typically called “child access prevention” or “CAP” laws — have already been adopted in 27 U.S. states, including five in the Midwest.

Some of these laws merely prohibit adults from intentionally or recklessly providing gun access to minors; others more aggressively impose criminal and/or civil liability for the negligent storage of firearms, regardless of whether minors actually access or use them.

Various forms of the tougher, negligent-storage prohibitions have been adopted in 14 states, including Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota. In contrast, Indiana, Wisconsin and 11 other states have outlawed the intentional, knowing or reckless provision of guns to kids, but not imposed criminal liability for negligent storage.

Almost half of the 50 states, and six of the 11 in the Midwest, have yet to adopt CAP laws, which raises an important question — do they work?

The short answer is, it depends on whom you ask. According to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, recent studies have associated CAP laws with documented declines in accidental deaths, suicides and non-fatal gun injuries among children.

And the RAND Corporation has found “supportive evidence” suggesting that CAP laws do effectively reduce suicide attempts and unintentional firearm injuries and deaths among minors.

But the National Rifle Association says CAP laws “are unnecessary, ineffective and endanger law-abiding gun owners.” It points to a competing study that found no evidence indicating that these laws reduce either suicides or accidental firearm deaths among kids.

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Legislators seek greater mental-health supports for farmers

Midyear signs point to the need for better connecting farmers to services that help them deal with stress, depression and other mental health challenges.

First, there is the history of the problem: In a study examining various industries between 1992 and 2010, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that farm operators and workers had the highest suicide rate.

Second, many rural U.S. communities struggle with shortages of mental health professionals: 65 percent don’t have a psychiatrist and 45 percent lack a psychologist, according to a 2018 study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

Third, many of today’s agricultural producers are dealing with high levels of stress, due to factors such as low commodity prices and decreased farm incomes.

“Now is the time to start addressing rural suicide and mental health issues,” Illinois Rep. Norine Hammond says. That is why she and other legislators pushed in July for passage of a resolution urging adoption of the federal FARMERS FIRST Act. The Midwestern Legislative Conference passed this resolution on the final day of its Annual Meeting. (The resolution came from the MLC’s Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee.)

Under the FARMERS FIRST Act, state departments of agriculture, extension services and nonprofit entities would get federal funding for help lines, suicide-prevention training and support groups.

The idea for this type of state-federal partnership is not new. The Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network was established in the 2008 U.S. farm bill, but never received funding.

The MLC resolution also encourages legislators to explore rural mental health programs in their respective states and provinces.

For more than a decade, the Wisconsin-based Sowing Seeds of Hope (funded in part with state and federal dollars) served as a model for how to help connect farmers with mental health resources and professionals. It did so through a mix of training, outreach and financial support.

A lack of funding ended Sowing Seeds of Hope in 2014, but some rural-specific resources remain in the Midwest. Examples include Nebraska’s Rural Response Hotline, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Mental Health Outreach Program, and the Wisconsin Farm Center.

“We need to let the men and women who work in agriculture know there are resources like the Farm Center available to help manage the stress of farming and, most importantly, remind them they are not alone,” Wisconsin Rep. Joan Balweg says.
Health & Human Services

Dose of reality: Committee gets primer on Canada’s health system

The reality of Canada’s health care system is different from the single-payer model sought by some U.S. liberals or the kind of government-controlled system often feared by U.S. conservatives, and different even from what many Canadians believe, Manitoba’s top health officials told lawmakers during a session at this year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. ‘Myths are misunderstandings that aren’t just for Americans, but Canadians who don’t really understand how the system works,’ said Kelvin Goertzen, Manitoba’s minister for health, aging and senior living. (Since the meeting, Goertzen became minister of health and training.) He was joined by Adam Topp, Manitoba’s director of health transformation and CEO of the Benchmark Intelligence Group.

According to two MLC speakers, the most persistent myths are that the system bars private payments, and that Canadian doctors and patients are fleeing to the United States.

Under the Canada Health Act of 1984, provinces have their own taxpayer-funded insurance for hospital care and certain doctors’ services, supplemented by private insurance and out-of-pocket payments for other services. While the system is publicly funded, care delivery is in the private sector — health care organizations are private (though not-for-profit), and doctors are mostly independent entrepreneurs, Topp said.

Canada’s current health care system began in 1947, when Saskatchewan introduced universal hospital coverage. The federal Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Service Act of 1957 then reimbursed provinces and territories half of their costs for specified hospital and diagnostic services; nine years later, the Medical Care Act began providing a 50 percent federal reimbursement for medical services provided by doctors outside of hospitals.

Today, there are gaps in coverage, the most obvious of which is routine dental care; Canadians must pay for that with private insurance, Topp and Goertzen said.

According to Goertzen, one growing problem is that models of care — including for mental health — are shifting to home care, which is more effective but removes them from the Canada Health Act’s purview. As a result, he said, the federal cost share has slid from 50 percent to 17 percent in Manitoba, while health care has increased to 44 percent of the province’s budget. Moreover, the cost of drugs, which already accounts for 16.4 percent of provincial health care expenses, is rising, creating discussion of a national “pharma-care” plan, Goertzen said. Provincial premiers are seeking to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to discuss health care because “the system is unsustainable; it will collapse in on itself” without changes, he said.

Even so, Canadians are not flocking across the U.S. border for medical care, nor are doctors abandoning the system. The Canada Institute of Information found that, in 2016, just 154 of the 84,063 physicians in Canada moved abroad, while 212 returned to Canada. And in a 2002 survey of 18,000 Canadians, only 20 of them said they had voluntarily sought treatment at a U.S. hospital.

Economic Development

Wanted: State policies that help build manufacturing workforce

In a July session that largely examined the future of a cornerstone of the Midwest’s economy, three expert speakers also illustrated to legislators just how far it has come over the past few years.

“Manufacturing is coming back to North America,” Mark Denzler, vice president and chief operating officer of the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association, told lawmakers who attended a meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s Economic Development Committee.

On the U.S. side of the border, more than 900,000 manufacturing jobs have been created since 2009, an increase of nearly 8 percent. In Canada, manufacturers have added more than 130,000 jobs since June 2013.

Nowhere do these trends matter more than in the MLC’s 11 states (home to one-third of U.S. manufacturing employment) and four affiliate Canadian provinces (which account for more than half of that nation’s jobs in the manufacturing sector).

While optimistic about the current state and future of this economic sector, the MLC panel of experts noted at least two potential obstacles to growth: global markets closing as part of protectionist trade policies (U.S. manufacturers export more than $1.4 trillion in goods annually), and firms not finding enough qualified workers.

Denzler and fellow panelist Gene Manchur of the Composites Innovation Centre in Manitoba cited skills gaps and worker shortages as major industrywide challenges.

In Minnesota, for example, a survey of that state’s manufacturers (which, combined, employ one out of every seven of the state’s workers) found workforce issues near the top of employers’ concerns. Attracting qualified workers ranked No. 2 (behind only health care costs), and retaining qualified workers ranked No. 4.

“Manufacturing has a lot of energy around it today, but workforce dominates everything; any growth plan requires workforce development,” said Bob Kill, president and CEO of Enterprise Minnesota.

He believes part of the solution is raising awareness among young people and their families about all of the opportunities that exist. “We should consider jobs in manufacturing to be careers,” he said.

Kill, too, encouraged policymakers to incorporate STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) into all curricula, not just those aimed at students seeking four-year college degrees. Another policy option for states is to invest in additional training for workers and education opportunities for young people that fit local labor demands, including in the manufacturing sector. Two recent examples of this approach are the Future Ready Iowa Act (HB 2458, signed into law in April) and Michigan’s recently enacted Marshall Plan for Talent (SB 941 and SB 942).

Dose of reality: Committee gets primer on Canada’s health system

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School-based mental health care seen as way to better identify students in need, improve access

For his first job out of college, psychologist Mark Weist went to work at a mental health center, splitting his time between providing services at the center and a local school. The differences in the two settings were dramatic.

“At the mental health center, people weren’t showing up,” Weist, a professor of psychology at the University of South Carolina, said during a presentation at this year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. “We’d be scheduled to see six or seven families in a day, for example, and only somewhere between one and three showed up.

“But in schools, there was this tremendous pent-up need for services.”

That experience nearly 30 years ago has led Weist to become a national leader in efforts to bring the mental health system into the schools, allowing community practitioners to work alongside school psychologists, nurses, social workers and counselors. He listed multiple benefits of school-based mental health: better identifying students in need, improving service access and use, and reducing barriers to learning.

Research in the field backs Weist’s anecdotal experience from early in his career: When compared to clinical settings, school-based mental health services better reach students, both in terms of initial enrollment and follow-up treatment.

And many students need the help. Nationwide, about 20 percent of young people have significant mental health needs.

This problem has received more attention in state legislatures in recent years, particularly after the mass shooting at a Florida high school in early 2018.

In the Midwest, for example, Wisconsin lawmakers agreed this year (as part of a $100 million school-safety initiative) to fund training on how school personnel can address the needs of students impacted by trauma and adverse childhood experiences. In Kansas, as part of the Legislature’s new education-funding formula (SB 423), mental health intervention teams will be established in select local schools. Minnesota has an existing grant program to fund school-based mental health services.

During the July session, which was presented by the MLC Education Committee, Weist also urged lawmakers to push for systematic or universal mental health screenings, which better identify students in need of services (as opposed to simply relying on the observations of school staff).

“[Schools] are avoiding screenings because the thought is, ‘If we screen, we’re going to identify students that we can’t treat [due to a lack of resources],’” said Weist. “But then we’re not attending to their needs.”

This is especially true of young people whose emotional problems are “internalized.”

“Students who act out tend to get attention and, therefore, receive services,” he said. “But students who don’t act out — the depressed ones, the anxious ones, the traumatized ones — are less likely to receive services.”

Last year, Illinois legislators passed a bill (SB 565) that will require social and emotional development to be evaluated as part of students’ routine health exams.

Brief written by Tim Anderson, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee. He can be reached at tanderson@csg.org.

Midwest-Canada Relations

Economic experts: In trade wars, the closer the relationship, the bigger the consequences

When countries enter a trade war, its effects depend in part on how close the nations are, in terms of geography and their existing economic relationship, Dan Ciuriak, a former Canadian government economist who now runs a consulting firm, told a committee of state and provincial legislators in July.

Few, if any, two nations in the world are more closely knit than Canada and the United States — a fact that would seem to point to major economic consequences if the two countries’ use of tariffs and retaliatory tariffs continues to escalate.

“The economic impacts have not really begun to be felt [by most consumers],” Ciuriak said during a discussion that he helped lead at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. At risk is a vibrant cross-border partnership in which $674 billion worth of goods and services were traded between the two countries in 2017.

A primary goal of the United States in imposing recent tariffs on goods such as steel and aluminum is to “bring value chains back to the U.S.,” Sherman Robinson, an economist at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told the MLC’s Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. But reaching this goal means upending established global supply chains, including those in place among the three countries of the North American Free Trade Agreement: Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Supply chains are networks of suppliers that add components (and value) to a product, ultimately resulting in a finished product. For example, U.S. and Canadian companies have been making cars and agricultural products together thanks to open-market policies that enabled the rise of binational supply chains.

According to Robinson, creating domestic-only supply chains “could be done in the long run, but it is impossible to do in the short run.” In some cases, for example, foreign suppliers provide specialty products that are not made in the United States.

Robinson warned, too, that the United States is not “the powerhouse of global trade that we once were.” (As a whole, NAFTA countries account for just under 14 percent of the share of total global trade.) As a result, if the U.S. continues to implement new tariffs and withdraw from the global free trade system, “the rest of the world will adjust,” Robinson said.

One possible result: The emergence of new trading alliances and value chains that don’t include products made in the United States.


Manitoba Minister Kelvin Goertzen and Ohio Rep. Bob Cupp lead the MLC Midwest-Canada Relations Committee as its co-chairs. Michigan Sen. Jim Stamas is the vice chair. (photo: Tracey Goncalves Photography)

Brief written by Ilene Grossman, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. She can be reached at igrossman@csg.org.

% of total U.S., Canadian exports that go to various regional economies around world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Canada</th>
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<tr>
<td>NAFTA countries</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Union/ European trading bloc</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>China and Hong Kong</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>East and Southeast Asia (without China)</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rest of world</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
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Source: Presentation by Sherman Robinson at MLC Annual Meeting

% of 2- to 17-year-olds with problems requiring counseling who received mental health care

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<th>86.3%</th>
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<td>80.7%</td>
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Source: “National Survey of Children’s Health, 2011/12” (Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health)
State policies, market forces point to bright future for solar and wind energy

for projects of all sizes — as large as utility-scale wind systems, as small as on-site and community solar development.

The Chicago Tribune recently noted that all of the recent activity marks “a potential sea change in the Illinois energy landscape.”

Ritter was part of that kind of sea change himself. As governor of Colorado, he made the transition to a “new energy economy” a top policy priority of his administration, including adoption of a renewable portfolio standard of 30 percent. He jokes that only a decade ago, the amount of installed wind capacity in Colorado wasn’t enough to power a “decent-sized ranch.” Today, this renewable source accounts for more than 17 percent of the state’s electricity generation.

“This is happening around the United States, in so many different places,” he said, including those without mandates such as renewable portfolio standards.

“Policy is not everything,” Ritter told lawmakers, but it can be “the driver that allows markets to take over.”

When he first became governor, Ritter said, the cost of wind and solar was about 9.5 cents and 23 cents per kilowatt-hour, respectively. Today, they have fallen to 2 cents per kilowatt-hour for wind and 3.6 cents for solar, including storage.

“Those are incredible numbers that no one would have believed only a few years ago,” Ritter said, noting that utilities are competing with each other to own the most wind power and are now setting internal goals for renewable energy that surpass state mandates.

These new market realities, Ritter said, should be considered by legislators as they mull new energy policies for their states.

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**Top three sources of Midwestern states’ electricity generation, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Coal</th>
<th>Natural gas</th>
<th>Wind</th>
<th>Hydro</th>
<th>Natural gas</th>
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<td>52.6%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
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<td>17.3%</td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
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<td>70.2%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
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<td>36.1%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
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<td>North Dakota</td>
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<td>Ohio</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
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<td>South Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
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Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration
State policies related to online sales tax collections from remote sellers

- Member of Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement; economic nexus and marketplace seller laws in place
- Member of Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement; economic nexus in law in place
- Member of Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement; marketplace seller law in place
- Member of Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement
- Economic nexus in law in place

* The Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement represents a multistate effort to simplify and modernize sales and use tax administration in order to reduce the burden of tax compliance. Economic nexus laws require out-of-state businesses to meet certain criteria to collect and remit the sales tax. Marketplace seller laws impose requirements on marketplace companies to collect sales taxes on behalf of sellers using their e-marketplace platforms.

Source: July presentation by John Hicks at MLC Annual Meeting

Led by South Dakota, states worked together for new sales-tax authority

For the fiscal year that began in July, Illinois assumed a revenue boost that it and most states have long been waiting to get on the books — tax collections from remote sales.

The state’s assumption is $150 million, based on the nine months that those collections can begin after Illinois’ "economic nexus" law takes effect this fall. (Spread over the course of a full fiscal year, the estimate rises to $200 million.)

In the years ahead, this revenue source is expected to be part of budget estimates and collections in every Midwesten state, thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court’s June 21 decision in South Dakota v. Wayfair (unlike Illinois, most states did not include an increase from online sales tax collections in their FY 2019 estimates).

By a vote of 5-4, the justices overturned a 1992 ruling, Quill Corp. v. North Dakota, that had barred states and local governments from requiring vendors with no physical presence in the state to collect sales taxes. In the years since Quill, online transactions skyrocketed, calls among brick-and-mortar businesses for sales tax fairness intensified, and multiple attempts at congressional action (always an alternative to a new court decision) failed.

"Hooray for South Dakota," John Hicks, executive director of the National Association of State Budget Officers, said, noting the state's passage of legislation in 2016 that became the basis for subsequent South Dakota’s. "

As Hicks and Soronen explained during separate presentations, the 2016 South Dakota law required most retailers without a physical presence in the state to remit the state’s sales tax. It applies to sellers with 200 or more annual transactions in South Dakota or whose gross revenue from sales in the state exceeds $100,000.

When legislators passed that law two years ago, Soronen said, "Its entire purpose was not to collect a dime worth of taxes" — at least in the immediate future. Rather, "it was simply to get a case before the Supreme Court."

Republican- and Democratic-led states across the country subsequently backed South Dakota’s legal push.

"It is absolutely unbelievable to have 41 states file amicus briefs asking the Supreme Court to do anything," said Soronen, whose center also files briefs (including in the Wayfair case) based on input from The Council of State Governments and the other "Big Seven" organizations that represent state and local elected and appointed officials.

While the Wayfair decision is undoubtedly a victory for states, the cautionary state policymakers that the justices did not uniformly bless any kind of state mechanism for taxing remote sales from out-of-state vendors.

Rather, Wayfair spoke specifically to the constitutionality of South Dakota’s actions.

For example, the state provides a safe harbor for small businesses or those with limited commerce activity in South Dakota, via the “nexus” thresholds of $100,000 and 200 transactions. In addition, the law doesn’t seek to collect taxes retroactively, and South Dakota is a member of the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement — a multistate effort to create a simpler, more uniform system of sales tax collection.

All states should now examine their existing laws on online sales tax collections, Soronen said. In the Midwest, every state except Illinois is part of the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement. Most states in the region, too, have some kind of economic nexus law in place; many have duplicated South Dakota’s $100,000 threshold in their own statutes.

"That might not be the right number for every state, depending on the size of your economy," Soronen cautioned. "Take California, for example, which has the 12th-largest economy in the world. I wouldn’t even consider the same threshold [of $100,000] as South Dakota’s."

Doer: Consumers need voice in trade deals and legislators can help

Though not formally part of the negotiations that could either preserve open trade among the three nations of North America or lead to a new era of protectionism, state and provincial lawmakers still play an important role in the outcome, Gary Doer said in July at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

His advice: Speak up on behalf of consumers, a group often left out of trade discussions because of the outsized influence of specific industry groups. "They don’t have the same voice as stakeholders, which are well organized," Doer said. "That includes Canada [and its trade policies]. For example, the price of milk is not given any analysis. What is it in Winnipeg? What is it in Minnesota? Prices and consumer impacts are not part of the analysis.

And in the United States, you have a coalition of owners of softwood lumber who have more say than all of the folks who go to Home Depot on Saturday."

Doer, the former premier of Manitoba and former Canadian ambassador to the United States, said sub-national legislators are in a unique position to push for more consumer-focused trade policy — they are closest to the people in their community, and can serve as conduits to federal decision-makers.

"If consumers were given the same weight as stakeholders, I think we could find a win-win in these negotiations [over the North American Free Trade Agreement]," he said.

For now, the Midwest is at the center of a vibrant U.S.-Canada economic relationship in which $2 billion worth of goods and services are traded every day. Canada is the biggest customer for exports from all 11 states in the Midwest; likewise, the majority of exports from this region's Canadian provinces go to the United States.

An end to NAFTA could greatly alter this partnership.

Trilateral discussions are ongoing, with agreements still needed on issues such as how to resolve trade disputes and whether to set new salary requirements in the auto sector.

On the idea of establishing a wage threshold for workers, a priority of President Donald Trump’s, Doer sees a path to compromise, calling the loss of manufacturing jobs a “common concern” in Canada and the United States. The third NAFTA country, Mexico, just elected a new president (Enrique Peña Nieto) who made improving the standard of living and raising incomes a cornerstone of his campaign.

“I don’t see him saying ‘no’ to a minimum increased wage for Mexican autoworkers,” Doer said.

Trump has called NAFTA “the worst trade deal ever,” but Doer is still hopeful that negotiations between the three countries can lead to a modernized agreement that allows all three sales to declare victory and avoid a trade war.

After all, he said, “with tariffs, who’s affected the most? Consumers.”

Article written by Tim Anderson, CSG Midwest publications manager. He can be reached at tanderson@csg.org.

Doer: Consumers need voice in trade deals and legislators can help

Gary Doer, the former premier of Manitoba and former Canadian ambassador to the United States, delivers the July 16 keynote presentation at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. (photo: Tracey Goncalves Photography)
Legislators urged to take care of Midwest’s regional transportation edge

By rivers, roads, rails or runways, transportation helped build the Midwest’s economy, but can the region meet the challenge of ongoing changes? Transportation mavens John Fuller and Joe Schwieterman joined the 73rd Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference in July to track development of the region’s transportation edge and how to maintain it.

Fuller, a professor and director of graduate studies at the University of Iowa’s School of Urban and Regional Planning who has worked with the Transportation Research Board, traced transportation from the colonial era, when moving people and goods by water was “far more economical” than land transportation, through development of the railroads and their eclipse by roadways and airplanes.

Railroads brought systemic and societal changes and were the first “game changing” technology, given their ability to stitch the continent together, Fuller said. While roads overtook rail, aviation became the second “game changer” technology and is now second to roads in terms of passenger miles traveled, he added.

Chicago’s $8.5 billion expansion of O’Hare International Airport, as well as U.S. and Canadian investments in new air traffic control systems (“NextGen” in the U.S. and “NavCanada” in Canada), reflect aviation’s continued importance, he said.

Overall, the U.S. transportation system is not in good shape, he said, citing the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2017 report card, which gives rail a B and every other mode C’s and D’s (see table).

“Are Midwestern transportation systems sustainable and capable of supporting economic growth?” Fuller asked.

Schwieterman, a professor of public service and director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University, focused on current issues including the impacts of ridesharing and intercity bus service on traditional transit agencies.

“The decline in transit ridership is due not only to ridesharing, but also due to the fact that more people are working at home, he said. Even so, a recent Chaddick Institute report suggests transit agencies should collaborate with ridesharing companies because “our basic sense is that these modes are for different purposes.”

“We’re trying to untagle and see what policies are best for Uber and Lyft,” he said.

Meanwhile, intercity bus service is coming back into vogue, especially with trips of less than 300 miles, as “people are fed up with airports,” Schwieterman said.

During a question-and-answer period at the MLC session, the two transportation experts were asked about automated vehicles, subsidies for intercity bus service to smaller communities, and even package delivery by drones. (“I don’t think we’re even close to seeing package delivery in the U.S.” Schwieterman said).

As for automated vehicles, Schwieterman said they’re likely to show up first as shared vehicles; Fuller said it’s hard to say when we’ll see them in large numbers.

“There are lots of questions about whether they’ll be ready for prime time,” he added. “Our whole world of [automated vehicles] and artificial intelligence moves in fits and starts.”

On whether subsidies, or state- and provincially owned bus services, would help connect smaller towns, Schwieterman said that in the United States, small subsidies “seem to work.” Fuller said that for remote parts of some U.S. states and for northern Manitoba, the sizes of and distances between communities mean direct subsidies to those communities to pay for service “is probably the only way to go.”

Predicting and polling in a dissonant age: Look to history as a guide

How hard is it to get accurate polling and predictions for the pending November elections in the face of polarized attitudes and tribal politics? “It is sort of hard to put into words what doing my job is like now,” journalist and political analyst Amy Walter told attendees in July during a plenary session at the 73rd Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference.

“We’re more inundated and insulated in our little media bubbles than ever before,” thanks partly to the proliferation of social media, and the vitriol and emotions attached to politics are “like I’ve never seen.” And when voters don’t know what’s true or who and which news outlets to trust, it’s easier to stay self-contained than to engage with possibly opposing views, Walter said.

Those social factors have made predicting election outcomes more difficult, but when looking to November’s elections, she said it’s best to rely on known data points. For example, Walter said the party in the White House almost always loses congressional, gubernatorial and state legislative seats in midterm elections.

“Historically the odds are, if you’re in the White House, you’re going to lose seats. The only question is, how many?” she said, before reframing it in Starbucks lingo: Will the loss be tall (small), venti (average) or grande (a wipeout)?

Walter said another historically known point is a strong correlation between the number of seats lost and the president’s popularity; when the president is below 50 percent, the average loss for the president’s party is 40 U.S. House and five U.S. Senate seats.

President Trump’s approval rating has been consistently hovering between 42 and 43 percent, and “that is a pretty foreboding sign for Republicans,” she said. “Another potential signal of trouble, Walter said, is that since the beginning of his presidency, more people strongly disapprove of President Trump than strongly approve of him (a 15- to 16-point gap).”

Articles on MLC meeting sessions

Logan, Utts

Source: American Society of Civil Engineers

Schwieterman

Source: American Society of Civil Engineers

Walter

Source: Amy Walter

Fuller

Source: Jon Davis, policy analyst and assistant editor for CSG Midwest. He can be reached at jdavis@csg.org.

Handicapping control of Midwest’s state legislatures after 2018 election

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>House</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Wisconsin</td>
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Source: Louis Jacobson, Governing Magazine (May 2018)

From legislative staff to lawyering to the Legislature, Sims aims to serve his community and, now, the Midwestern Legislative Conference

by Jon Davis (jdavis@cg.org)

EIlge Sims Jr., didn’t plan for his public service to be as an elected official. After graduating from Illinois State University, he went to work in the General Assembly on the staff of then-Senate President Emil Jones, eventually becoming director of appropriations.

“I figured I’d spent 10 years on the staff,” he recalls. “I left, went to law school, and started practicing law. I figured I’d be practicing law and helping out my community by doing things related to that.”

But after earning his law degree from Loyola University of Chicago in 2007, and opening his own law firm one year later, Sims saw an opportunity in 2010 to serve his community (the Chatham neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side) by running for the Cook County Board.

Sims ran for the Illinois House in 2012, winning a five-candidate primary election and then taking the general election with all but 129 votes. He served there until January, when he was picked to replace retiring state Sen. Donnie Trotter.

Sims also has long been active in The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference, and this summer, the region’s legislators elected him to be MLC chair in 2018.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Sims discussed what motivated him to enter the General Assembly and what he hopes to accomplish as MLC chair.

Q: What got you interested in public service, and in becoming a state legislator?
A: Seeing the ability to impact my community is really what drove me. I wanted to really get out there and make a change in the community, so I ran for the County Board. I wasn’t successful, but that didn’t stop me. I stayed out there and continued to work in the community, doing the things I’d been doing — helping raise money for scholarships for kids and buying books for needy children — and, eventually, I ran for the Illinois House.

My predecessor in the Illinois House said she was going to retire after a long, distinguished career. Having worked in Springfield before, I knew the issues, I knew the landscape.

It would be a way for me to really get involved and make a difference at the grassroots level in a number of areas: education, criminal justice reform, job creation, economic development. I knew I could do that.

Q: What was that moment when you decided, “Yeah, I could be a legislator... I can do this?”
A: When I saw the opportunity to help my community and make a difference in education policy. It’s one of those issues that I personally advocated for and worked on for a number of years; even when I was in undergraduate school, I wrote my senior thesis on the inequities in Illinois’ education funding formula. So it was an area where I knew the need for reform. It needed individuals who understood the process, who understood what the outcomes should be — which is an education that was fair for all children, equitable for all children, irrespective of where they lived or what their familial status was.

Q: What are some of the areas that you plan to focus on as chair of the MLC?
A: I am committed to making sure we’re investing in the next generation of leaders; that we are making sure that we’re preparing today’s students for the challenges that they’ll see ahead; and that we’re investing in the workforce of tomorrow to prepare them for the jobs and opportunities of tomorrow.

One of the issues that we worked on when I was co-chair of the MLC Economic Development Committee was preparing young people and retooling not just young people, but retooling all individuals to make sure we’re preparing them for the economy that’s coming, not just the economy we have. ... So as we look at economic development, how do we invest in our workforce today so that it is prepared as our economy continues to change?

Q: As part of your emphasis on investing in the next generation of leaders, you’ve mentioned the importance of raising civic engagement. What might that entail?
A: We’ve got some programs here in Illinois and the Chicago area that really talk about showing our young people what government is, and what government is not. And by “what government is not,” I mean getting them away from the sensational news that they hear every day, wherever they get their news from, getting them away from the sensational to get them to understand exactly what government really does and how it impacts individuals’ lives.

We have so many young people who want to be part of the change; they want to affect the government around them. They want to affect their community. And sometimes they just don’t know how, so we want to make sure we’re engaging those young people in that discussion, so they really can be a part of the future of our governments.

Q: What was the moment when you decided, “Yeah, I could be a legislator... I can do this?”
A: When I saw the opportunity to help my community and make a difference in education policy. It’s one of those issues that I personally advocated for and worked on for a number of years; even when I was in undergraduate school, I wrote my senior thesis on the inequities in Illinois’ education funding formula. So it was an area where I knew the need for reform. It needed individuals who understood the process, who understood what the outcomes should be — which is an education that was fair for all children, equitable for all children, irrespective of where they lived or what their familial status was.

Q: Have you identified any particular points you want to look at, or do you seek more of a general, regionwide discussion on that subject of workforce “retooling” and preparedness?
A: Some of the work I’ve done legislatively is to make sure we’ve modernized Illinois’ education curriculum to help prepare students for the work that’s coming. While we want everybody to get a high-quality education, we want to make sure that we recognize that not everybody is going to go to college.

So how do we modernize our curriculum to ensure that, if you’re not going to go into a four-year liberal arts education, other alternatives are out there? What else would you be going to? What else would you be doing? We’re going to have experts come in who can talk to us about those topics, but also talk to us about what employers are looking for.

Q: What got you interested in public service, and in becoming a state legislator?
A: Seeing the ability to impact my community is really what drove me. I wanted to really get out there and make a change in the community.”
Can ‘Hub and Spoke’ break opioid crisis?

Wisconsin adopts Vermont approach as latest step in its fight against opioid addiction; and for one representative, it’s personal


E ach day, 115 people die in the U.S. from opioid overdoses. That’s nearly 42,000 deaths from opioids each year. This public health issue is now causing more yearly deaths than breast cancer and many more than prostate cancer.

This issue is very personal for me, and recently became even more real for my family. Now, more than ever, do I feel the disastrous consequences of addiction. Wreckage left in the wake of addiction is left for family members and friends to pick up and put back together.

With that said, my family’s story is not unique. In fact, it is all too common in a seemingly endless line of destructive examples. These stories illustrate how addiction continues to have negative consequences on families and communities nationwide. These stories are the motivating factor behind my work in the Wisconsin Legislature to fight this epidemic.

And the good news is that our hard work is having an impact. Data recently released by the Wisconsin Prescription Drug Monitoring Program is very promising. When comparing the first quarter of 2018 to the same time in 2015, Wisconsin saw a nearly 30 percent decrease in opioid prescriptions. This decrease helps close the door to future addiction and saves lives.

Since 2013, Wisconsin, through broad bipartisan support, has passed more than 30 pieces of legislation as a part of the Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education (HOPE) Agenda. After watching this epidemic ravage northern Wisconsin in particular, I made it my mission to do all that I can to end it.

Our first wave of bills in the 2013-14 legislative session focused on responding to incidents of opioid abuse, obtaining and disposing of opioids, and creating or expanding treatment programs in communities throughout Wisconsin.

The most prolific bill of the 2013-14 legislative session focused on the usage of naloxone, also known as Narcan. This bill expanded the use of naloxone drastically statewide in a multitude of ways. First, we expanded training opportunities for first responders in administration of the drug as a way to lower the mortality rate of heroin and opioid overdoses.

Second, we required emergency medical technicals to carry a supply of naloxone and to keep records of its administration. We also legalized the prescribing of naloxone to trained individuals who are assisting individuals at risk of overdose.

Finally, we created immunity from civil and criminal liability for prescribers and administrators of naloxone.

Additionally in 2013-14, we worked to improve access to treatment for individuals suffering from opioid abuse. We provided funding to expand existing treatment programs and created pilot programs for under-served areas of the state.

The second round of HOPE Agenda bills was introduced in the 2015 legislative session. Building on the momentum of the previous session, we expanded access to the life-saving drug naloxone, broadened reporting requirements for the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, provided more funding for treatment alternatives and diversion programs, and crafted a number of laws to allow the state to reduce opioid abuse in Wisconsin.

The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program has been one of Wisconsin’s strongest tools in the fight against the opioid epidemic. By simply reporting and tracking prescriptions and the patients that are receiving them, we have reduced “doctor shopping” by 47 percent and have significantly reduced the number of opioid prescriptions.

A reduction in the use of opioids means less individuals at risk of developing potentially deadly addictions. It also means we are able to focus resources on expanding treatment to individuals currently struggling with addiction without adding to their ranks.

In 2015, we introduced three bills aimed at strengthening the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program with the hopes of halting addiction before it begins. In an attempt to curb doctor shopping, the amount of time that physicians have to report a filled prescription to the program was reduced from seven days to 24 hours.

We also required practitioners to utilize the program to review a patient’s records prior to prescribing opioids. In an effort to increase the flow of information among prescribers and law enforcement, we required law enforcement to also use the program to report illegal or inappropriate use of monitored prescription drugs, opioid-related overdoses, and reports of stolen prescription drugs.

In September 2016, Gov. Scott Walker issued an executive order creating the Governor’s Task Force on Opioid Abuse. I was appointed to serve as the co-chair of this task force along with Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch. The task force consists of a group of state leaders, state agencies, addiction experts, and members of law enforcement who are working to end opioid abuse in Wisconsin.

Since its conception, we have held numerous meetings throughout Wisconsin. In January 2017, the task force submitted a report to Gov. Walker which led to the passage of 11 bills, most of which focused on expanding treatment options and recovery programs.

Hub and spoke

More recently, Wisconsin has partnered with The Pew Charitable Trusts to study Wisconsin’s treatment systems. Through months of stakeholder meetings and discussions, Pew made a set of recommendations which have since been passed into law.

The most significant of the recommendations was for Wisconsin to explore a “hub and spoke” treatment delivery system, comprised of regional “hubs,” or opioid treatment clinics providing medically assisted, intensive programs, that are linked to “spokes,” or office-based settings for less intensive opioid treatments.

Vermont installed a Hub-and-Spoke system in 2014, and has seen positive outcomes as a result: a Vermont Department of Health study in 2017 reported a 96 percent decrease in opioid use and a 92 percent decrease in injection drug use among system participants.

That state now has the highest capacity for treating opioid use disorders in the United States and has seen a dramatic increase in the number of physicians able to prescribe buprenorphine, which helps reduce withdrawal symptoms for people addicted to opioids. I am optimistic that the Hub-and-Spoke model will yield similar results for Wisconsin.

I firmly believe it is because of the work we have undertaken in Wisconsin that we are now seeing positive impacts throughout the state.

We have given Wisconsin a chance. We have given our most vulnerable a chance. And we have given families ridden with worry and despair, a chance. A chance for a life free of addiction and sorrow.

Together as a state we are seeing the turn of the tide. But the fight is far from over; if we stop now, if we get complacent, we will lose to the perils of addiction. As long as family and friends are dying from the catastrophic effects of the opioid epidemic, there is still more work to do.

Rep. John Nygren is a Republican from Marinette.

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.
Legislators forge closer interstate, cross-border ties at Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting

Held this year in Manitoba, the nonpartisan, family-friendly event included sessions on public policy and professional development.

For 73 years, the Midwest’s state legislators have gathered annually to share ideas and learn from top policy experts—all in the name of improving state government.

This past year, they came to Winnipeg, Manitoba, marking the third time that a Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting has been held in an affiliated Canadian province. The location was an ideal place to advance what has become a hallmark of the MLC Annual Meeting in recent years: the building of cross-border relationships between the Midwest’s states and provinces.

In all, about 400 state legislators, provincial lawmakers and other guests took part this summer in the nonpartisan, family-friendly event. It included:

- meetings of the MLC’s six interstate committees on agriculture, criminal justice, economic development, education, health and Midwest-Canada relations (see pages 2, 3 and 4 for details);
- plenary sessions on energy policy (see page 7) and Canadian astronaut and neurologist Roberta Bondar;
- a professional development session on media relations led by journalist Adam Schrager; and
- the passage of policy resolutions on the interstate shipment of meat, chronic wasting disease, rural mental health, the labeling of honey and maple syrup, and the Midwest’s relations with Taiwan.

CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.

Overview of 11-state Midwestern Legislative Conference’s affiliation with Canadian provinces

- The MLC first formed a Midwest–Canada Relations Committee in 1991, in recognition of this region’s important binational economic ties.
- Since its inception, this committee of legislators from the states and provinces has served as a forum for cross-border dialogue, information sharing and cooperation. In addition, the committee serves as a voice for the Midwest’s states and provinces on federal-level decision-making.
- Legislators from the affiliate provinces serve on MLC committees and take part in the group’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development.
- Provinces can host the MLC Annual Meeting, and Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan have done so.

Images from the 2018 MLC Annual Meeting in Winnipeg

Several state legislators from the Midwest took part in a “mock question period” on the first day of the MLC Annual Meeting. Held in the house chamber of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly—with a hockey stick used in place of the traditional ceremonial mace—this evening event gave U.S. lawmakers the opportunity to learn about one of the most important, and interesting, features of the parliamentary system.

During question period, members of the opposition party in Canadian legislatures seek information from the government and its ministers. Participating state legislators took on the role of the opposition party and of the government.

(All photos on this page: Tracey Goncalves Photography)

The Council of State Governments was founded in 1933 as a national, nonpartisan organization to assist and advance state government. The headquarters office, in Lexington, Ky., is responsible for a variety of national programs and services, including research, reference publications, innovations transfer, suggested state legislation and interstate consulting services. The Midwestern Office supports several groups of state officials, including the Midwestern Legislative Conference, an association of all legislators in 11 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan are MLC affiliate members.

The Midwestern Legislative Conference is a group of state and provincial legislatures from 11 states and provinces: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.
Region’s legislators elect South Dakota Sen. Gary Cammack to be MLC officer

A six-year veteran of the South Dakota Legislature has been selected by the Midwestern Legislative Conference to join the nonpartisan group’s four-member leadership team.

Sen. Gary Cammack will serve as second vice chair in 2019 and is in line to be MLC chair in 2021.

In the Legislature, he serves as chair of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. He also is a member of the Local Government and Taxation committees. He served in the South Dakota House for two years before winning election to the Senate in 2014.

Outside the Legislature, Cammack and his wife, Amy, have been nationally recognized for their leadership in agricultural conservation and stewardship. They own and operate Cammack Ranch, a 11,000-acre beef cattle ranch in western South Dakota, and received the Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award in 2017.

“Gary and Amy have paved the way for conservation adoption in their state as steadfast advocates for stewardship and civic engagement,” the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Association of Conservation Districts said last year in announcing the award, noting the couple’s efforts to raise awareness among young people about how to raise food sustainably by implementing various practices on their family-run operation.

This year, Cammack Ranch won the Leopold Conservation Award for its rotational grazing practices, constructed windbreaks, and the planting of more than 30,000 trees.

Cammack is a fourth-generation cattle producer. With Amy, he also owns Cammack Ranch Supply and currently serves as president of the South Dakota Retailers Association. The current officers of the MLC are Indiana Sen. Ed Charbonneau, chair; Illinois Sen. Elgie Sims, first vice chair; Michigan Sen. Ken Horn, second vice chair; and Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen, immediate past chair. A rotation of officers occurs every year based on elections that take place at the MLC Annual Meeting.

CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.

Ten legislators from eight Midwestern states tapped to take part in CSG leadership training

Ten state legislators from the Midwest are part of CSG’s newest class of Toll Fellows. The Toll Fellowship Program, named for The Council of CSG’s newest class of Toll Fellows. The Toll Fellowship Program, named for The Council of State Governments’ founder Henry Wolcott Toll, is one of the nation’s premier leadership development programs for state government officials.

Along with the 10 legislators shown below, two other state officials round out this year’s Toll Fellows class from the Midwest: Heather Smith, Medicaid director for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services; and Courtney Phillips, chief executive officer for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Each year, Toll Fellows brings 48 of the nation’s top officials from all three branches of state government to Lexington, Ky., for an intensive five-day, five-night “leadership boot camp.” The program’s sessions are designed to stimulate personal assessment and growth, while providing priceless networking and relationship-building opportunities.

### Midwest’s Legislators in CSG’s Toll Fellows Class of 2018

- South Dakota Sen. Gary Cammack
- Kansas Sen. Rick Billinger
- Illinois Rep. Laura Fine
- Indiana Sen. Randy Head
- Wisconsin Rep. Gary Hebl
- Ohio Rep. Brigid Kelly
- North Dakota Rep. Corey Mock
- Minnesota Rep. Dave Pinto
- Illinois Rep. André Thapedi
- Indiana Rep. Holli Sullivan
Michigan will require lead service lines to be replaced starting in 2021

As part of what state officials say is the strictest set of lead and copper standards in the nation, Michigan will require all of the state’s public water systems to replace their lead service lines.

Starting in 2021, the Detroit Free Press reports, each public water system must replace, on average, 5 percent of its lead service pipes per year over a 20-year period, with water customers paying for most of the estimated $2.5 billion price tag.

The new state-level rules also create stricter “lead action levels,” the point at which a water system must take steps to control corrosion. The federal lead action level is 15 parts per billion; Michigan’s will be 12 ppb starting in 2025. In addition, the state will establish a new water system advisory council and mandate that two water samples be collected at sites served by lead service lines.

“The federal Lead and Copper Rule simply does not do enough to protect public health,” Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said in June when announcing the new standards. The changes come four years after the start of a public health crisis in the Michigan town of Flint — the result of residents’ drinking water being contaminated with lead due to a switch in the town’s water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River.

On measures of child well-being, 3 Midwest states rank near top

In this year’s edition of a much-cited, comprehensive study of child well-being, Minnesota (fourth), Iowa (fifth) and Nebraska (ninth) ranked among the top-10 U.S. states. Results in the “2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book” (a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation) are based on 16 indicators in four areas: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

No Midwestern state ranked lower than 33rd (Michigan). The region fared particularly well in the category of economic well-being, which is based on measures such as median family income and the percentages of children living in poverty, parents without secure employment, families receiving public assistance, and households with a high housing-cost burden. North Dakota (first), Nebraska (second), Iowa (fourth), Minnesota (fifth), Kansas (eighth), South Dakota (ninth) and Wisconsin (tenth) all ranked in the top 10.

The data book’s national analysis points to positive trends since 2010 in areas tied to a child’s healthy development — for example, lower poverty rates, a slight increase in the percentage of young people with health insurance, and higher graduation rates. However, “KIDS COUNT” researchers also note that “troubling disparities persist among children of color and those from low-income and immigrant families.”

Teacher training, state standards part of computer-science laws

One year ago, Iowa legislators passed a bill to advance the instruction of computer science. With the start of the new school year, two key objectives of that measure are in place.

The Iowa Department of Education announced in June that new voluntary academic standards and a $1 million fund for professional development had been established. Developed by the State Board of Education, the new standards outline what students in every grade should know and be able to do in the area of computer science. The fund will go to local schools that help staff pursue teaching endorsements or other learning opportunities in computer science.

Meanwhile, at least two other Midwestern states, Indiana and Ohio, have taken major steps over the past year to advance computer science in schools. Under Indiana’s SB 172 (signed into law in March), coursework in this subject area must be offered in every public high school as a one-semester elective at least once a year. It also sets up a grant program for teacher training and requires schools at all grade levels to include computer science in their curriculum.

Ohio’s HB 170 was signed into law late last year. It calls for the adoption of statewide academic standards and a model curriculum, and allows high school students to take computer science as an alternative to Algebra II or a unit of science.

Illinois changes how it handles complaints of legislative wrongdoing

Illinois lawmakers have changed the process for investigating claims of inappropriate behavior in the legislative branch, a move that proponents say will give individuals more confidence to report inappropriate behavior.

HB 138 was signed into law in June. With the statutory change, the Legislative Inspector General can conduct independent investigations into sexual harassment allegations without obtaining consent from the Legislative Ethics Commission — a bipartisan group of Illinois representatives and senators.

Lawmakers established the Office of the Legislative Inspector General 15 years ago, and this year’s changes seek to provide it with greater independence while also improving transparency regarding ethics complaints. Under HB 138, an independent committee of judges and/or former prosecutors will conduct searches for a new legislative inspector general when a vacancy arises (the legislature retains the authority of appointment). The new law, too, ensures that the position of legislative inspector general is filled in a timely manner, that his or her investigative duties will be handled by the state’s auditor general.

Illinois’ law also authorizes the inspector general to share information about the investigative process with complainants.