Taking the ‘middle pathway’

Iowa, Michigan laws reflect rising demand for workers with postsecondary training, but not necessarily bachelor’s degrees

by Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org)

A mbitious plans with ambitious goals: That describes how policymakers in two Midwestern states approached efforts in 2018 to ensure that their respective workforces can meet the demands of employers in an increasingly technological, skill-based economy. In Michigan, lawmakers enacted Gov. Rick Snyder’s Marshall Plan for Talent (SB 941 and SB 942), which will invest $100 million to rebuild the state’s workforce pipeline. In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds continues to champion a statewide goal first set when she was lieutenant governor: Increase the share of workers with a postsecondary education, training or credentials to 70 percent by 2025. (Currently, 58 percent of Iowans have education or training beyond a high school degree.)

These policy shifts in states such as Michigan and Iowa are a response to long-term changes in the U.S. economy. According to Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, in 2017, only 28 percent of U.S. jobs required education beyond high school. By 2025, the center says, two-thirds of jobs will demand some postsecondary education or training. “We’re finding that in manufacturing, in particular, and other industries, there is upskilling going on,” says Neil Ridley, the center’s director of state initiatives. “Workers who in the past could do fairly well with just a high school diploma or less are increasingly being hired with a technical associate’s degree or certification that shows the acquisition of a skill.”

According to the National Skills Coalition, these “middle skill” jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, make up the largest part of the U.S. labor market.

Today, especially with unemployment rates low in many states (see table), the supply of these workers is not keeping up with demand. Michigan’s $100 million plan

Over the past decade, few states have seen

a greater shift in the labor market than Michigan. During the Great Recession, that state’s unemployment rate hit a high of 14.6 percent, highest in the nation. Since then, though, Michigan has experienced a period of economic growth; the state now has a jobless rate of 3.9 percent, only slightly higher than the national average and lower than its industrial counterparts of Ohio and Illinois.

This trend has created tight labor markets in which employers cannot find skilled workers to fill job openings. According to Michigan’s Department of Talent and Economic Development, 100,000 workers are needed to fill high-wage, high-demand positions in the state. That number is projected to grow to 811,000 by 2024. Those projected job openings carry with them $50 billion in potential payroll earnings.

“From welders to nurses to software engineers and mechanical engineers, in all of these industries we’ll see some kind of shortage,” says Michigan Sen. Ken Horn, chair of the Senate Economic Development and International Investment Committee.

“That is where we have to focus when we start thinking about making investments into finding this talent.”

The state’s new Marshall Plan for Talent appropriates $100 million for a talent investment fund to improve worker skills. Nearly $59 million is set aside for schools to improve their education and training programs — for example, competency-based learning programs related to high-demand, high-wage...
Great Lakes

Federal law on ballast water preempts state rules, but provides path for basinwide standards

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tates will lose authority to adopt and enforce their own standards on ballast water discharges under recent changes in federal law. President Donald Trump signed the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (part of a broader measure on the U.S. Coast Guard) in December.

 Passage of the compromise measure capped years of legislative debate over how ballast water discharges should be regulated — particularly who should be setting and enforcing the standards.

The issue is central to government policy related to Great Lakes protection. The reason: Invasive species are considered a top threat to the lakes' ecosystem, and the one of the ways they get to the lakes is via the ballast water of oceangoing ships.

Concerned about this threat and not satisfied with federal action, Michigan legislators passed a groundbreaking law in 2005 that created a ballast water permitting program with state-level standards. This program remains in place today, despite recent legislative efforts to eliminate it due to concerns about the impact on the state's shipping industry.

Michigan currently requires any oceangoing vessel that conducts port operations within the state to employ one of four ballast water treatment methods.

Once rules under the new federal law take effect, however, Michigan will no longer be able to enforce its current state-level standards.

Minnesota and Wisconsin are among the other states with their own requirements for ballast water management and/or their own permitting programs.

Despite what it called an "unfortunate" loss of state authority, the Chicago-based Alliance for the Great Lakes hailed the compromise federal legislation as a victory for Great Lakes protection. Joel Brammeier, the alliance's CEO and president, points to two key provisions in the new law.

First, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maintains its authority to regulate the discharge of ballast water as a pollutant under the Clean Water Act. Other versions of the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act would have eliminated EPA's authority and given it solely to the U.S. Coast Guard.

To date, these two federal agencies have had parallel regulatory programs. The new law gives control to the EPA, an agency that can use its authority under the Clean Water Act to establish science-based treatment standards that better protect the Great Lakes, Brammeier says.

A second provision in the law authorizes $50 million for early detection and rapid response programs that stop invasive species from getting established in the Great Lakes. (A congressional appropriation of this money would still be needed.)

"Those types of programs can work, especially if you're able to find invasive species in river mouths or harbors," Brammeier says. "States haven't had the resources to have rapid response and early detection programs that can really make a difference. That could change now if the $50 million gets appropriated."

The new law also gives the region's governors the ability to petition the federal government to allow for basinwide standards on ballast water discharges that are more protective of the Great Lakes than those in place at the national level.

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Trade deal will deliver modest market gains for region's farmers

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during the first 23 years of the North American Free Trade Agreement, U.S. agricultural exports to the country's northern and southern neighbors nearly tripled, reaching $39.2 billion by 2017.

Not only did the overall numbers increase over this time, notes an October study commissioned by the Farm Foundation, but the Canadian and Mexican markets became bigger shares of U.S. agriculture business — nearly 30 percent of exports in 2017 vs. only 14 percent in 1995 (see chart).

And while such exponential growth is not expected under NAFTA's replacement — the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA — the deal appears to be a good one for the Midwest's farmers, says Wally Tyner, a professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University.

"[It] will lead to an expansion of U.S. agricultural exports to Canada by $450 million [a year], mostly in the dairy and poultry sectors," says Tyner, a co-author of the Farm Foundation study.

Under NAFTA, these two sectors have been an exception to the opening of agricultural trade between the United States and Canada. For example, after a fixed amount of U.S. tariff-free exports of dairy and poultry was reached, Canada has been imposing a tariff of more than 200 percent on milk, cheese, cream and butter.

Under the USMCA, Tyner says, these quotas on U.S. exports are being relaxed. Canada also agreed to raise the domestic price of ultra-filtered milk (a high protein milk concentrate used to make cheese and yogurt), thus giving U.S.-made products a better chance of competing. For poultry trade, about 21 million dozen eggs already are exported to Canada; the new trade agreement allows an increase of 10 million dozen more eggs.

Canadians, meanwhile, won key concessions that expand their peanut and sugar producers' access to U.S. markets.

For a time, it appeared that the United States might withdraw from NAFTA, without a replacement. Such a move would have resulted in a net decline of U.S. agricultural exports of more than $9 billion, according to a 2017 study done by the C.D. Howe Institute.

The new agreement, if approved by all three countries, should bring a "sigh of relief to U.S. farmers," Tyner and his co-authors write in their October study. However, they warn that the modest gains for agriculture under the USMCA could be more than offset by the effects of a broader, "volatile trade policy environment." Canada and Mexico have implemented tariffs against a wide swath of agriculture goods in retaliation for new U.S.-imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum.
Most Midwest state-supported passenger rail routes maintain strong 10-year ridership growth

Ridership on state-supported passenger trains in the Midwest grew 9 percent between fiscal years 2008 and 2018, but one-year growth slowed to just 0.4 percent from FY 2017 to FY 2018, according to an analysis by the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

Among state-supported trains, the Blue Water (Chicago-Port Huron, Mich.) posted the biggest 10-year gain — 36 percent — followed by the Lincoln Service (Chicago-St. Louis) with a 23 percent gain.

Other routes that saw double-digit gains included the Hualawha (Chicago-Milwaukee), up 13 percent, and the Missouri River Runner (St. Louis-Kansas City), up 12 percent. The Wolverine (Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac, Mich.) was up 2 percent.

Al Johnson, manager of the railroad operations section in the Michigan Department of Transportation’s Office of Rail, attributes ridership gains on the Blue Water and Wolverine to track and signal work for 110 mph service, station improvements, better on-time performance and additional passenger amenities such as WiFi, bicycle racks and the ability to bring pets on board.

Illinois Department of Transportation officials credit the Lincoln Service’s gains to increased frequencies, new stations, and track work to upgrade the corridor for 110 mph service.

“The Lincoln Service ridership gains are a great example of what can occur when you have frequent and reliable service throughout the day, and quality amenities to offer to the customer,” says Beth McCluskey, director of the Illinois Department of Transportation’s Office of Intermodal Project Implementation and MPRRC chair. “New equipment is the next step in improving those amenities and the overall customer experience.”

Arun Rao, passenger rail manager at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, says the Hualawha has had steady annual growth and record high ridership in FY 2018 due to myriad economic factors, including increased use by major companies in the region. Highway construction and traffic congestion have also led to increased passenger use, he adds.

Routes with ridership drops over those 10 years include the Pere Marquette (Chicago-Grand Rapids, Mich.), down 14 percent; the Hoosier State (Chicago-Indianapolis), down 12 percent; the Illini/Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale, Ill.), down 9 percent; and the Carl Sandburg/Illinois Zephyr (Chicago-Quincy, Illinois), down 6 percent.

Because it’s a shorter route than the Blue Water or Wolverine, the Pere Marquette’s ridership was likely impacted harder when gasoline prices fell, Johnson says.

And while the declines on the Illini/Saluki are attributed to poorer on-time performance, those on the Carl Sandburg/Illinois Zephyr are harder to determine, since on-time performance has remained excellent, McCluskey says.

Jim Stark, director of the Indiana Department of Transportation’s Multimodal Division, says the Hoosier State has suffered from a lack of active marketing and from its origin as a shuttle train bringing cars to and from Amtrak’s stop at Beech Grove, Ind. It became a truly state-supported route only in 2014, and active marketing is now being done.

Michigan turns to objective parole to reduce strain on its corrections system

The Michigan Legislature has codified the use of an objective, evidence-based scoring system that determines a prisoner’s probability of parole success.

Under HB 5377, signed into law in September, individuals who score highly will be released from prison after completing their minimum sentence — unless the Parole Board provides one of 11 “substantial and compelling objective reasons” for not doing so.

The scoring system, which is based on a set of guidelines including mental and social evaluations, has been used for years and generally scores parole applicants as having a high, average or low probability of parole success.

However, only about 75 percent of highly rated prisoners have been approved for release. This partly led to the explosion of Michigan’s prison population from about 14,000 in the 1970s to 39,000 today.

Additionally, Michigan’s corrections spending as a percentage of the state budget increased from about 3 percent to about 20 percent during the same period.

“[HB 5377] will ensure more offenders are given a chance at being productive citizens in our state and lessens the burdens on taxpayers for corrections spending,” says Rep. Klint Kesto, the bill’s main sponsor.

Independent organizations such as Safe & Just Michigan, the ACLU of Michigan, and the Alliance for Safety and Justice estimate that HB 5377 could reduce Michigan’s prison population by between 1,800 and 2,400 over the next five years. These organizations also claim that the legislation will save Michigan taxpayers between $40 million and $75 million annually within five years. The legislation passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the Michigan House and Senate.

HB 5377 eliminates some of the Michigan Parole Board’s discretionary authority. Still, the board can continue to deny parole for prisoners rated as having a high probability of success — by citing one of the 11 "substantial and compelling reasons". Some of these reasons include "the prisoner is a suspect in an unsolved criminal case that is being actively investigated" or "the prisoner refuses to participate in programming ordered by the department to reduce the prisoner’s risk.”

According to the University of Minnesota's Robina Institute of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, more than half of the Midwest’s states have abolished discretionary parole since 1977.

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin all use a system of “determinate” parole, sentencing the institute found, in which a prisoner’s release date can be accurately predicted by the judge’s determination at the end of the offender’s trial.

John Cooper, associate director of policy and research for Safe & Just Michigan, does not believe Michigan should follow in these states’ footsteps.

“[HB 5377] will ensure more offenders are given a chance at being productive citizens in our state and lessens the burdens on taxpayers for corrections spending,” says Beth McCluskey of the Illinois Department of Transportation currently serves as commission chair.

Brief written by Jon Davis, who can be reached at jldavis@csgr.org. CSi Midwest provides staff support to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, an interstate compact group of state legislators, governors and their designees. Beth McCluskey of the Illinois Department of Transportation currently serves as commission chair.

Criminal Justice & Public Safety
Getting the lead out after Flint: How states reacted to the crisis

After the water crisis in Flint, Mich., burst onto the national scene in late 2015 and early 2016, many states took a closer look at their laws regarding lead pipes and water service lines. A new report from the Washington, D.C.-based Northeast-Midwest Institute details post-Flint lead laws and regulations passed since 2015 in those regions.

In the Midwest, legislators in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin approved bills that became law requiring the inventorying of lead service lines and determining how water systems can cover the cost of removing them, or mandating lead testing in schools and day-care centers. Additionally, Michigan and Ohio enacted other regulatory measures.

“In the absence of a strong and proactive federal response to the crisis, some states have addressed various aspects of this issue, but a comprehensive approach is lacking,” authors of the report say.

**Michigan: Get rid of all lead pipes and notify residents faster of problems**

Not surprisingly, Michigan was among the leaders in post-Flint legislation targeting lead contamination in water. Michigan is now the only state in the country to adopt a stringent state version of the federal Lead and Copper Rule, ahead of revisions due at the federal level in 2020, according to the report.

Under new rules promulgated by the states’ Department of Environmental Quality, water utilities will be required to replace all lead service lines, public and private, within 20 years at the utilities’ expense, at a rate averaging 5 percent per year starting in 2021. And, beginning in 2025, the state’s lead “action level” — the amount of lead that requires remediation action and public notification by utilities and state officials — will be lowered to 12 parts per billion from the existing 15 ppb set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

HB 5120, which took effect in March 2017, requires cities to notify residents of lead contamination within three days of its being reported by public water systems.

**Illinois: Test all older K-5 schools and inventory lead pipes statewide**

In Illinois, SB 550 (signed into law in early January) requires community water systems to create a comprehensive inventory of lead service lines, including privately owned ones, and notify affected building occupants. It also allows water utilities to charge a hazard recovery fee to pay for that work.

The new law also requires lead testing in all elementary schools — public and private — built before January 2000. By July 2019, the Illinois Department of Public Health must determine whether schools built since that date should also be tested. The law also mandates lead testing in licensed day-care centers, as well as in home and group day care settings.

Illinois also set its “action level” for school lead remediation efforts at 2 ppb as of December 2018, the lowest in the country.

Elsewhere in the Midwest, Minnesota legislators in 2017 passed the K-12 education omnibus bill, HF 890, which requires lead testing in all public schools once every five years (that clock began ticking in July).

Minnesota also has set two action levels for lead detected in school water fixtures — an actionable standard of 20 ppb and an advisory standard of 2 ppb. When lead is detected in water fixtures at 20 ppb or higher, schools are required to not use the fixture for cooking and drinking purposes and to identify remedial measures.

If lead levels between 2 ppb and 20 ppb are detected, the affected water fixtures may still be used for cooking and drinking while remedial measures are explored.

Ohio’s HB 512, passed in 2016 and in signed in June of that year, requires water systems to identify and map areas of the systems that are known or are likely to contain lead service lines, and to identify characteristics of buildings that may contain lead piping, solder or fixtures. Maps must be updated every five years.

On its website, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency now lists maps of lead service lines provided by all 3,851 of Ohio’s water utilities.

Indiana legislators in 2017 passed HB 1519, which allows public water utilities to include customer lead service line replacements as eligible infrastructure-improvement charges for water and wastewater utilities, and lets regulated water and wastewater utilities charge the cost of replacing lead service lines through rate fees.

Wisconsin’s SB 48, which became law in February, allows municipalities and private utilities to provide financial assistance to property owners to replace the lead water service lines on their property, which they (not the utilities) own. The law doesn’t define ownership but treats the portion of the line on private property as owned by the property owner and refers to it as a “customer-side water service line.”

Despite these laws and the news media coverage of the health hazards from lead pipes, the Northeast-Midwest report states, “In the absence of federal action on lead in municipal water, state action has been less than robust.”

But it also notes that the turnover in governors and legislators from the November 2018 general election and increasing citizen activism “will likely result in more states revising their existing laws and regulations in the coming years.”

The report concludes there is room for improvement: “While elements of certain state laws are laudatory (for instance, affordability provisions in Wisconsin and mandatory school lead testing every year in Pennsylvania), no one state’s approach is comprehensive enough to be used as a template for other states.”

Article written by Jon Davis, CSG Midwest policy analyst. He can be reached at jdavis@csg.org.
A mong the world’s democracies, the use of a single, partisan, elected official to oversee the voting process is an anomaly. But among the U.S. states, it is the more norm: In the Midwest, for example, secretaries of state serve as the chief election officers in all but Illinois and Wisconsin.

Some election cycles come and go without much notice from what author Jocelyn Benson has called the “curious tension” that comes when the head of the state’s elections gets to the position as the nominee of a political party.

The year 2018 will not be remembered as one of those election cycles, however. The reason: the race for governor in Georgia.

One of the people running for that position was Brian Kemp. He was Georgia’s secretary of state at the time, and in the run-up to the election, decisions on voter-registration applications and complaints about faulty voting machines turned the “curious tension” into a national controversy.

According to Daniel Tokaji, a leading authority on national elections, the events in Georgia were an “excessive example of a common problem.”

“You’re going to have situations of actual bias in elections [oversight] or situations that at least look like bias to the public,” says Tokaji, a professor of constitutional law at The Ohio State University’s Moritz College of Law.

“Either way, it’s a problem, especially today when you hear more and more talk about elections being rigged and people questioning the legitimacy of democracy.”

In her book “State Secretaries of State: Guardians of the Democratic Process,” Benson acknowledges the conflict of interest, but also notes the countervailing influence of democracy itself — “the tremendous power of voters to provide the ultimate ‘check’ on the neutrality of their election officials.” In part, Benson’s book sought to show the positive work that secretaries of state have done to promote a healthy democracy.

How much does she believe in the office? So much so that Benson decided to seek it herself — and in November, Michigan voters elected her their next secretary of state.

But Tokaji believes states should consider alternative models that turn over elections authority to independent entities.

Wisconsin once led the nation in this approach, he says, through the use of a Government Accountability Board. Established by the Legislature in 2007, the board was made up of six nonpartisan former state judges appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. Legislators did away with the board eight years later, however, following a dispute over the handling of an investigation involving then-Gov. Scott Walker’s campaign and outside political groups.

Tokaji says the board worked well during its brief stint as a state entity, but notes that this type of independent entity “can be hard to design and implement, and very hard to keep in place.”

The overseer of Wisconsin’s elections is now a six-member commission: four are appointed by the state’s legislative leaders (two Democrats and two Republicans) and two are appointed by the governor, who must select one Democrat and one Republican. Similarly, Illinois’ eight-member State Board of Elections has an equal number of people from the two major parties. (They are appointed by the governor.)

“The problem with bipartisan boards is there can tend to be a lot of stalemate when it comes to making important decisions,” Tokaji says.

He adds that there hasn’t been much movement to replace the secretary-of-state model in place in most states. In 2005, a ballot proposal in Ohio would have moved administration of state elections from the secretary of state’s office to a nine-member appointed board — four Democrats, four Republicans and one independent (the latter being appointed by the chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court). This proposed constitutional amendment was rejected by 70 percent of Ohio voters.

Two states in the Midwest, Indiana and South Dakota, do employ a hybrid approach. While the secretaries of state oversee elections, some of their powers are shared with appointed boards.

**Capital Closeup is an ongoing series of articles focusing on institutional issues in state governments and legislatures. Previous articles are available at csgmidwest.org.**

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH**

**QUESTION: Do any Midwestern states require computer science classes for high school graduation?**

According to the Education Commission of the States, the answer is no.

But an ECS report compiled in January 2018 found that many Midwestern states allow computer science classes to be counted as a fulfillment of required math and science credits — for math in Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin; and for either math or science in Iowa, Michigan and Ohio.

Some U.S. states, including Indiana, also have begun to require that high schools make computer science classes available to their students.

Under Indiana’s SB 172, signed into law in 2018, coursework in this subject area must be offered in every public high school as a one-semester elective at least once a year, starting with the 2021-22 school year. The new state law also sets up a grant program for teacher training and requires schools at all grade levels to include computer science in their curriculum.

Iowa and Ohio are among the other states with significant new laws on computer science.

Iowa’s SF 274 of 2017 called for new standards that outline what students in every grade should know and be able to do in the area of computer science. Such standards were subsequently adopted in June by the state Board of Education.

Under that same law, legislators directed the Iowa Department of Education to convene a working group to fulfill the goal that every school district offer, starting in the 2019-20 school year, a “high quality” computer science course in high school, an exploratory course in middle school and a basic course in elementary school. Lastly, the state has established a $1 million professional development fund. The money goes to local schools, which, in turn, use the state dollars to help staff pursue computer science-related endorsements or other learning opportunities.

Ohio’s HB 170, signed into law in late 2017, calls for the state Board of Education to adopt statewide academic standards for computer science and a model curriculum. It also allows high school students to take computer science as an alternative to Algebra II or an advanced unit of science, excluding biology or life sciences. (Ohio students who opt for computer science instead of Algebra II must be told that some colleges nonetheless may require Algebra II, so the substitution might hurt their admission chances.)

The 2018 “State of Computer Science Education: Policy and Implementation” (a report done by the Code.org Advocacy Coalition and Computer Science Teachers Association) identifies several policy strategies for state legislatures to consider. They include establishing rigorous course standards, providing clear certification pathways for computer science teachers, and making this subject area a part of universities’ teacher-preparatory programs.

**Who has authority to oversee elections in Midwest states?**

- Secretary of state is chief elections officer
- Secretary of state is chief elections officer; some powers shared with appointed board
- Bipartisan, appointed board oversees elections

**Source:** CSG’s “The Book of the States” and professor Daniel Tokaji

**Who has authority to oversee elections in Midwest states?**

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**Source:** CSG’s “The Book of the States” and professor Daniel Tokaji

Question of the Month response by Jon Davis, CSG Midwest policy analyst. He can be reached at jddavis@csg.org. Question of the Month highlights an inquiry sent to the CSG Midwest Information Help Line: csgm@csg.org or 651.925.1922
Apprenticeships, scholarships part of states’ plans to meet workforce needs

In 1948, the United States created the Marshall Plan and invested millions of dollars in assistance to help in the economic recovery of Western Europe after World War II. Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder borrowed the name for his effort to rebuild the state’s workforce. He signed the Marshall Plan for Talent into law (SB 941 and 942) this summer.

“It is a big, overarching program,” Sen. Ken Horn says. “We are trying to cover all of our bases.”

The plan makes a $100 million investment in workforce preparation, with an emphasis on partnerships and collaborations among industry, education and community organizations. It includes nearly $59 million in innovation grants to reimagine the way students, educators and businesses approach workforce preparation. For example:

- $29.9 million to expand K-12 programs that focus on creating competencies in high-demand fields;
- $10.5 million to hire staff for career counseling activities, including the creation of education development plans and talent portfolios as well as the identification of work-based learning opportunities and career exploration activities; and
- $18.5 million for the purchase or lease of equipment.

The remaining funds are dedicated to programs and activities such as:

- scholarships and stipends to help low-income individuals earn a degree or credential in a high-demand field;
- incentives for school districts to offer scholarships and for postsecondary institutions to provide coaches and mentors to scholarship recipients; and
- funding for the Innovative Educator Corps, a group of educators honored for their innovation and who will receive stipends to share their innovations with others around Michigan.

Rep. Hall, Best’s colleague on the other side of the aisle, says Future Ready “was thoughtfully done,” and has the support of legislators in both parties. But he agrees that funding remains a challenge.

“We want to make sure that there’s a way to phase it in over a period of time and make sure that the highest priorities are met first,” he says. “$18 million is a sizable price tag considering we’ve had trouble funding some basic services, like Medicaid and public K-12 schools, over the last couple of years.”

For Best, one of the most promising parts of Iowa’s new investment is the opportunity it gives local communities, including some of the state’s
rural areas that are struggling the most with a skills and talent gap.

“We want to take the needs of the employers in the community and make sure those area community colleges and training organizations can provide formalized training,” he says.

Thinking beyond four-year degrees

Sen. Horn is hoping Michigan’s Marshall Plan for Talent is only part of a broader rethinking about college and careers. He recalls a conversation in which a college student asked him what could be done to reduce the cost of his tuition. Horn’s response: “Is that the right question to ask? Does the college have value for you? Maybe that’s what we need to be asking.”

Tight labor markets and rising college debt are helping drive this conversation.

“Whatever we do to fix this [workforce] problem, it has to be high school, plus,” Horn says. “Whatever your career calls for, go out there and do it with confidence, but don’t go into college blindly. We have to stop this madness of going to college just for a general education.”

Best says one objective of the Future Ready Act is expand choices for young Iowans.

“A lot of our high school kids are graduating and automatically thinking that to be successful, they have to go on to a four-year college,” Best says. “I graduated from high school in 1978, and the big thing for me was to get away and get a four-year degree.

“At that time the college debt was not so bad, but it’s a different world now. Now you have this college debt that is sometimes six figures, and you don’t have a major that’s going to pay very well. It’s a problem.”

How can states better promote these middle-skill pathways as an alternative? For starters, Ridley suggests collecting concrete data on the career opportunities, and then sharing it with young people and their families.

“Get better information on wages and the career prospects that are available to workers,” Ridley says. “Develop an information source and a very granular set of data,” he adds.

“Not just generally what you can get with an associate’s degree or a B.A., but what you can get with an A.A. in engineering technologies or in mechatronics, and even more specifically, which of those programs in Michigan or in Indiana or in Illinois are going to be the best bet for you.”

Promoting jobs in the skilled trades

Horn’s concern is that with such an emphasis on students attaining bachelor’s degrees, “we left the skilled trades behind.”

The need in Michigan for more skilled professionals — in areas such as construction, information technology, health care and manufacturing — led to Horn’s sponsorship of the Going PRO Talent Fund (SB 946). Signed into law earlier this year, this measure codified, and renamed, an existing fund.

Between 2014 and 2018, that fund issued more than $70 million in grants to 2,200 companies across the state. It is credited with creating 14,000 jobs and retaining another 56,000. Under the new Going PRO name, the state will make $30 million in grants available in 2019 to employers.

The funds are to be used for short-term training that addresses a skilled-trades gap in Michigan’s workforce and that provides participants with an industry-recognized credential. Employers partner with community colleges, universities or other organizations to deliver the training.

“We tried to make it as stable and as predictable as we could without taking away flexibility for the people who are actually working the program,” Horn says.

In addition to the technical training, the Going PRO Talent Fund sets aside dollars for management training, thus helping workers move into lower-level management or for- man positions.

Horn acknowledges that going PRO and the Marshall Plan for Talent are only part of the solution to meeting Michigan’s workforce needs — pieces of a “very big, 2,000-piece puzzle,” he says. Policies that address quality of life and that make Michigan’s communities more attractive to people matter as well.

Hall notes a similar challenge in Iowa, saying the skilled-workforce question is “very important, ” but “not a silver bullet.”

“Iowa is growing, but at a slower pace than many other states, and so we see a lot of younger people who are leaving the state and choosing not to work here after they finish high school or college,” Hall says.

“On the one hand, there’s a question of how we increase the share of our overall workforce that has some additional education or work credential, and then the other piece of it is how we grow the state’s population on the whole.”

More good-paying jobs need workers with ‘middle skills’

Millions of “good jobs” are available in the U.S. economy for people without a bachelor’s degree, but the type of work — and what is required — is changing.

In a report released this fall by the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce (“Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs”), researchers document the need for workers to have the right mix of some education and training beyond high school.

This “middle skill” pathway fills the rising demand for workers in a diverse set of occupations, from electricians and mechanics, to health care technologists and computer control programmers. The common denominator in these industries is that individuals must have particular skills and technical training.

“In the 1970s and ’80s, workers with a high school degree or even less than a high school diploma could land a good job in a plant and have a very good career and a middle-class salary,” says Neil Ridley, the center’s director of state initiatives.

Since then, he adds, “there’s been a shift in the industry mix where we’re finding good jobs.

What is a ‘good job’?

The center defines it this way: a job that pays at least $35,000 a year, averages $56,000 for workers with less than a bachelor’s degree, and averages $65,000 when workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher are included.

Nationwide, between 1991 and 2015, all of the growth in good jobs in the “non-BA economy” occurred in the middle-skill pathway. A total of 4 million good, middle-skill jobs were added over this time (from 12 million to 16 million); in contrast, the number of jobs for people with no more than a high school diploma fell by 2 million (from 15 million to 13 million).

This trend is occurring across the country, but with some significant regional differences, the center shows in its 2017 study “Good Jobs That Pay Without a BA.”

For example, as a result of declines in manufacturing employment, the Great Lakes region lost more than 700,000 “good” jobs in blue-collar industries. Conversely, the number of these jobs actually increased in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. But one trend in the “non-BA economy” was common across all of the Midwestern states: a rise in the number of “good jobs” in the skilled-services industries (see table).

(These jobs) are requiring more post-secondary education and have higher requirements,” Ridley notes.

For more information on the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce and its Good Jobs Project, visit https://cew.georgetown.edu.

Change in % of “good jobs” for workers without a bachelor’s degrees: 1991 to 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Change in skilled-seniors industry jobs</th>
<th>Change in blue-collar industry jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>+34,000</td>
<td>-226,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>+128,000</td>
<td>-11,000</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>+44,000</td>
<td>-56,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Skilled-services industries include financial and business services; education services; health care services; leisure and hospitality; personal services; and government services.

2 Traditional blue-collar industries include manufacturing; transportation and utilities; construction; wholesale and retail trade; and natural resources.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, “Good Jobs That Pay Without a BA.”
South Dakota Sen. Jim Bolin

Retired educator on government now values chance to be part of the legislative process — from crafting bills to building relationships

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

A longtime teacher of high school history and government in his adopted South Dakota hometown of Canton, Jim Bolin had learned much about the ins and outs of politics by the time he became an elected official himself. There was at least one lesson, though, that could only come with firsthand experience.

“Being in the Legislature, you see how much of government and lawmaking is a human process,” he says. “There are relationships you develop that help you accomplish your goals.”

Legislative colleagues become trusted friends, Bolin adds, and they help you fine-tune a policy idea or discover a weakness in your legislation that needs fixing.

Now entering his 11th year as a South Dakota legislator, Bolin looks back on how those personal relationships helped get landmark legislation on South Dakota’s roads and teacher pay signed into law.

But he’s also looking forward to 2019, when he takes on the position of Senate assistant majority leader. One of his goals for the new year and in his new position: Help new members make the personal connections that they need — and the Legislature as a whole needs — to be successful.

The learning curve can be steep in South Dakota, where legislative sessions come and go faster than in most states. Lawmakers meet for 40 days before returning home, and along with passing a budget, they will be asked this year to address concerns ranging from how special education is funded in South Dakota to how some rural areas lack access to mental health services. Bolin expects, too, to lead discussions on improving civics education and ensuring free speech on the state’s college campuses.

In a December interview with CSG Midwest, he discussed the legislative year ahead and looked back on his decade of service to date. Here are excerpts from the interview.

Q: Based on your nearly 10 years of personal experience and observations of the process, what do you view as the most important attributes for a legislator to have?
A: I think it’s important to know who you are — to be comfortable in your own skin and to have perspective about the work. You know it’s important, but you’re not going to sell your soul to every issue carefully and on their own merits. I was convinced on both — raising the gas tax and then raising the sales tax — that they would improve the outlook of our state.

In South Dakota, we accomplish a lot without a lot of resources because we are a low-tax state. We emphasize the basics, and roads and schools are two of the most important, core functions of government. With those two laws, we’ve protected our infrastructure and we’ve ensured quality teaching.

Q: You’ve said that two of the most important legislative actions in recent years involved tax increases — raising the gas tax by 6 cents per gallon for roads and the sales tax by a half-cent to pay for increases in teacher pay. Why did you support these proposals?
A: You’ve mentioned, too, that you will revisit some legislation from 2018 that seeks to ensure free speech on college campuses. What have legislators been exploring in that area?
Q: South Dakota is known to be fiscally conservative, and passing tax increases requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature. How were you and other supporters able to gather enough votes?
A: One factor was that these were not excessively high tax increases. For instance, when you compare our road tax to our neighbors, Iowa and Minnesota, our taxes are still much lower. The people of this state saw that, and realized that these were things that had to be done. Inside the Legislature, we had bipartisan support in both instances, and probably the No. 1 thing was that our governor got behind the measures.

Q: It looks like your background in teaching is informing some of the policy work you have planned for 2019. For example, you’ve made civics education a priority. What kind of changes are you looking for in that area?
A: I would like to put into South Dakota’s education standards for graduation that students get at least one semester of civics education. Our new governor (Kristi Noem) has emphasized that we need to increase our student involvement and knowledge of civics education. I don’t know if she’ll support our exact proposal, but we’re hopeful that we can work out some details so that civics education is emphasized more in our K-12 system. It goes back to things that I think we all want to see — for example, increasing voter participation and encouraging young people to appreciate the political process.

Q: Along with these specific policies, you plan to spend considerable time helping new legislators. What advice do you plan on giving them?
A: First, stay in good contact with your constituents back home. And then during session, don’t take the lead in pushing really controversial issues, unless you have a really compelling interest to do so. Those issues will be there anyway; others will bring them forward. … I’ll also encourage them to listen a lot and try to learn a lot. If you study the issues, you become a better legislator, and it can change your viewpoint as well. Over the years, I’ve learned that some of the ideas that I had weren’t accurate. However, on many issues, I remain convinced that my initial views were correct.
A new communications tool for Ohio’s police, disabled community

Database will alert officers of individuals whose communication is impaired

by Ohio Rep. Scott Wiggam

In public service, one has the opportunity to meet individuals with incredibly moving stories. Shortly after I was elected to serve my home county of Wayne (located in northeast Ohio) in the House of Representatives, a local mother called my office to share her passionate concern with me. Her son was diagnosed with autism at an early age, and was preparing to graduate from high school. Now, just as any parent, this mother became anxious due to her son recently receiving his driver’s license. I personally remember the pit in my stomach when my children pulled out of our driveway as they sat behind the wheel.

My wife and I, however, did not have this mom’s additional worries. She was concerned that if her son were to be pulled over by a police officer, he may be overstimulated by the lights, sirens and stress when approached by the officer. Social and sensory overstimulation is a common characteristic for individuals with autism, and her son had communication barriers as well. This loving mother wanted to make sure she or her son had a way of notifying an officer — before he or she approached the vehicle. With such notification, the situation could be handled appropriately, and conflicts could be avoided. As she shared her heartfelt concerns, I began to envision a bill that, ultimately, was on the minds of several other representatives.

‘Help de-escalate police encounters’

After a conversation with Rep. Theresa Gavarone, we drafted a bill and introduced it as HB 115 in 2017. It was signed into law this summer. As a result, we are helping remove the barriers between law enforcement and individuals with communication disabilities by creating a voluntary, state-run initiative for individuals to notify law enforcement of this potential hindrance.

This information is then entered into a police database, so officers are immediately notified that a communication disability may impact the individual they are about to approach. This identification is made in the database — through the individual’s license plate, driver’s license or state ID.

By simply taking a one-page form to the doctor, an individual who meets the inclusive definition of a communication disability can have the form signed and turned in to one of Ohio’s local Bureau of Motor Vehicles offices.

This information is then entered into a police database, so officers are immediately notified that a communication disability may impact the individual they are about to approach. This identification is made in the database — through the individual’s license plate, driver’s license or state ID.

Heinz von Eckartsberg, police chief for the city of Dublin, stated during legislative testimony on HB 115 that the bill “could help to de-escalate encounters with police.”

This new law is not exclusively for individuals with autism. For example, veterans and others suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder may volunteer to provide this information to law enforcement. The deaf community and individuals suffering from multiple sclerosis also are eligible to inform law enforcement about their communication disability.

In the past, the absence of such a voluntary registration system in Ohio has harmed individuals, while not providing our law enforcement officers with a vital tool for interacting with the community.

Ohioans from all over the state visited my office as I helped draft the legislation. They shared personal stories of being unable to communicate with officers, and how this escalates their encounters with police. We’ve also heard about high-profile incidents in other states.

Recently, a deaf man in Oklahoma City was killed by police when he did not respond to an officer’s verbal orders. The neighbors of this individual frantically attempted to inform the officers that the man could not hear them, but the lack of information available to the officers potentially led to this altercation escalating into a fatal shooting.

Additionally, a 14-year-old autistic child in Arizona was tackled by police in a park and arrested when he was exhibiting characteristics of an individual under the influence of drugs.

This child was playing with a piece of string. When asked what he was doing, the 14-year-old told the officer that he was “stimming.” This term is used to describe the actions of an individual with autism, such as rocking in place or repeatedly flapping one’s hands. The officer did not know what the child meant, assumed he was on drugs, and tackled him to the ground.

Bill received bipartisan support

HB 115 enjoyed bipartisan support as it made its way through the Ohio General Assembly and to Gov. John Kasich for his signing.

This bill transcended the party politics that is all too common in Columbus and Washington, D.C.

I am very proud of our General Assembly for the passage of House Bill 115. We not only addressed the concerns of a mother in my home county, but showed how states across the nation can create a seamless process for improving communication between law enforcement and some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Rep. Scott Wiggam, a Republican, was first elected to the Ohio House in November 2016.

Summary of recently signed HB 115

- Allow individuals (or their parents or guardians) to voluntarily register as being diagnosed with a communication disability or a disability that can impair communication
- Develop a verification form for these individuals that includes certification by a health care professional about the communication disability
- Include in the verification form (for use in the database; see below) the individual’s driver’s license or state identification card number, as well as any relevant license plate numbers
- Require Ohio’s Department of Public Safety to create a database of individuals who voluntarily register (information in the database is not a public record)
- Make this database available to state and local police via the Law Enforcement Automated Data System

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 Midwest Legislative Conference. Responses to FirstPerson articles are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csg.org.
CSG Midwest part of orientations for newly elected state legislators

As a result of this fall’s elections, individuals from across the region became state legislators for the first time. They also are the newest members of the Midwestern Legislative Conference — the nonpartisan group of all 1,550 state legislators from this region. (Legislators from four affiliate Canadian provinces also are part of the MLC.)

CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC, and this fall, it took the opportunity to welcome lawmakers and help prepare them for their legislative service.

New-member orientations in the region brought The Council of State Governments to the capitols of Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin. For Nebraska’s event, CSG Midwest provided a special guest speaker — political scientist Gary Moncrief, a distinguished national expert on state legislatures whose books include “State Legislatures Today” and “Why States Matter.”

Moncrief is well known among many current state legislators in the region for his role as a featured scholar at CSG Midwest’s annual Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development. In November, he spoke to Nebraska’s newly elected state senators about the critical role that state legislators and legislative institutions play in U.S. democracy.

CSG is a national, nonpartisan, region-based organization serving all three branches of state government. Through its participation in new-member orientations, CSG is able to introduce legislators to all of its services — for example, research and policy assistance, leadership development, and various networking and learning opportunities.

Under the Dome: Customized services for legislatures

Political scientist Gary Moncrief’s participation this fall in Nebraska’s new-legislator orientation is the latest example of how CSG Midwest is bringing programming to state capitals through its Under the Dome initiative.

Under the Dome reflects a commitment that the Midwestern Legislative Conference has made to bring more in-state training to its members: the region’s state legislators. (CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.)

With the help and guidance of legislative leadership in individual states, CSG Midwest delivers customized training to lawmakers inside their state capitols — for example, briefings covering policy areas of interest or workshops focused on professional development and consensus building.

Legislators are encouraged to reach out to CSG Midwest staff about potential Under the Dome programming (see list to the right for examples of past events). Please contact CSG Midwest assistant director Cindy Andrews at candrews@csg.org or visit www.csgmidwest.org.

Past events held in Midwest’s state capitols

- Budget policy — Illinois
- Entrepreneurship policy — Nebraska
- Ethics training — Indiana
- Great Lakes/water policy — Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio
- Legislative civility — Minnesota, Nebraska and Ohio
- Medicaid/health policy — South Dakota and Wisconsin
- Promoting and protecting state legislative institutions — Nebraska and South Dakota

How to get the most from your membership in CSG and the MLC

✓ Participate in Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC) policy committees, the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, or other regional or national groups
✓ Rely on CSG for research assistance
✓ Advance public policy with the help of experts at the CSG Justice Center, the CSG Center for Innovation and the National Center for Interstate Compacts
✓ Attend the MLC Annual Meeting and the CSG National Conference
✓ Read CSG publications such as Stateline Midwest, Capitol Ideas and “The Book of the States”
✓ Apply for a fellowship to one of CSG’s leadership development programs

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.
CSG toolkit examines how states can help injured workers return to labor force

The Council of State Governments has developed a new toolkit for lawmakers looking for ways to bolster labor force participation among people who have had a work disability.

Released at CSG’s National Conference in December, this new resource provides states with policy options, best practices and implementation strategies. The U.S. Department of Labor and the Office of Disability Employment Policy’s State Exchange on Employment and Disability collaborated with CSG on the toolkit.

Millions of Americans exit the workforce each year because of a disability. Disability insurance benefits are an important protection for workers with serious long-term or permanent disabilities, but they are not the only option for those with disabilities.

With timely, effective help, many injured workers might be able to stay in their jobs. Return-to-work programs aim to get workers with disabilities back to productivity as soon as possible during their recovery process. These workers can continue earning money and regain the confidence and stability that employment brings.

Employees exiting the workforce because of injury or illness can result in high costs for all stakeholders. In addition to losing a stable income, employees can face additional health concerns, such as depression from the adjustment and a reduced quality of life. Employers lose productivity and often must take on new hiring and training costs. States, meanwhile, lose tax revenue and personal spending in the economy, while absorbing the costs of state disability benefits.

Workforce inclusiveness has been a priority for state leaders nationwide, and CSG has been working to provide states with technical assistance around disability employment and stay-at-work/return-to-work programs.

“States need to realize that this is a return on investment,” says Tennessee state Sen. Becky Massey, who served on the CSG Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Leadership Team. “We are not simply accommodating people with disabilities, but we are tapping into an underutilized resource.”

CSG Midwest brings together leaders of states’ nonpartisan legislative service agencies

During a two-day meeting this November in Chicago, nonpartisan staff of the region’s state legislatures explored ways to enhance the work of their agencies and the services they offer to lawmakers.

CSG Midwest provides staff support to the Midwestern Legislative Service Agency and Research Directors Group. The group typically convenes once a year.

The 2018 meeting featured discussions on protecting the legislative branch from cybersecurity threats; the proper role of nonpartisan staff in advocating on behalf of the legislative branch; building trust and strong working relationships with legislators; and workforce recruitment strategies for legislative agencies.

Rates of overall labor force participation in Midwestern states: October 2018 vs. October 2000

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% point change</th>
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<tr>
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<td>64.5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65.1%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
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<td>62.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The rate is the percentage of the total civilian population, ages 16 and over, that is either working or seeking work.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

About the Midwestern Service Agency/Research Directors Group

- interstate group of directors and other staff from Midwestern states’ nonpartisan legislative service agencies
- These service agencies handle numerous tasks for the legislative branch — for example, research, bill drafting, committee staffing, membership services, information technology, staff management and training, and professional ethics.
- CSG Midwest provides staff support to the group and facilitates the interstate exchange of information among participating agencies.

Contact: Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org) 630.925.1922
csgmidwest.org

Contact: Lisa Janairo (ljanairo@csg.org) 859.244.8000
csg.org

CSG Henry Toll Fellowship Program

August 23–28, 2019
Lexington, Kentucky

Contact: Kelley Arnold (karnold@csg.org) 630.925.1922
csgmidwest.org

Great Lakes Legislative Caucus Annual Meeting

September 13–14, 2019
Chicago, Illinois

Contact: Lisa Janairo (ljanairo@csg.org) 920.458.5910
greatlakeslegislators.org
Michigan, Minnesota near top of U.S. states for economic growth

Michigan and Minnesota had among the fastest-growing economies in the nation during the first half of 2018, according to federal data released in November.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis looked at the gross domestic product in all 50 states, comparing the size of each state’s economy between the first and second quarters of this year. On that measure, only Texas’ GDP grew at a faster rate than Michigan’s. The Wolverine State’s growth rate of 5.4 percent was led by a rise in the manufacture of durable goods (cars, machinery and other products expected to last a long time).

Minnesota’s GDP increase was 5.0 percent, fourth in the nation. That state’s agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sector had one of the highest rates of growth in the nation. (South Dakota’s) had the highest.

GDP grew in every U.S. state between the first and second quarters of 2018. Here are the overall growth rates and U.S. rankings for the other Midwestern states: Illinois, 3.6 percent; Indiana, 3.6 percent; Iowa, 3.6 percent; Kansas, 4.7 percent; Nebraska, 3.7 percent; South Dakota, 3.5 percent; Ohio, 3.7 percent; Wisconsin, 2.8 percent; and Michigan, 2.8 percent, 48th.

In fall elections, voter turnout spiked in every Midwestern state

Voter turnout rates for this fall’s elections rose significantly in every Midwestern state, eclipsing 50 percent in all but Illinois and Indiana.

The U.S. Elections Project collects the state-by-state data. Its turnout numbers are based on the percentage of the voting-eligible population that cast a ballot. (Turnout is sometimes based on the voting-age population, a method used by the U.S. Elections Commission.)

Preliminary data collected by the U.S. Elections Project show Minnesota as having the highest turnout rate in the nation: 64.2 percent. Wisconsin ranked fifth (61.2 percent).

Nationally, the turnout rate was nearly 50 percent. That reverses a decades-long trend in which voter participation had been falling in non-presidential election years. In 2014, the U.S. voter turnout rate was 36.7 percent.

Along with Minnesota and Wisconsin, seven other Midwestern states had turnout rates higher than the national average, according to preliminary estimates from the U.S. Elections Project: Iowa, 57.7 percent; Kansas, 50.2 percent; Michigan, 57.8 percent; Nebraska, 51.1 percent; North Dakota, 58.6 percent; Ohio, 51.5 percent, and South Dakota, 53.4 percent.

Increase in meth use causing health, other problems in region

The problem of methamphetamine availability and use is on the rise, with parts of the Midwest being hit harder than most other regions of the country.

Iowa health officials announced in November that between 2014 and 2017, the number of admissions for methamphetamine treatment increased by 38 percent. That same month, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s Omaha Division released data showing that methamphetamine seizures had risen by 3 percent over the past year in a five-state region: Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota.

According to the DEA, most of the methamphetamine available in the United States comes from Mexico. (Domestic methamphetamine production is at its lowest level since 2000.)

In 2017, South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard called the methamphetamine problem in his state an “epidemic.” One year later, lawmakers in that state passed two bills (SB 63 and SB 65) strengthening state enforcement of illegal distribution and manufacture of the drug. In Nebraska, during the first seven months of 2017, parental use of methamphetamine was a factor in one of every three removals of children from their home.

Record number of women now hold seats in state legislatures

A record number of women will be serving in the nation’s state legislatures in 2019, due in part to recent election results in Midwestern states such as Michigan and Iowa.

According to the Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, the proportion of seats in state legislatures held by women will be at least 28.3 percent in 2019. That is up from the 2018 level of 25.4 percent.

In the early 1970s, women accounted for less than 5 percent of U.S. state legislators. That figure climbed to over 20 percent by 1993 and is now nearing 30 percent. “The only question that remains is whether 2018 was a one-off or a new norm,” says Debbie Walsh, the center’s director.

Michigan’s increase in the number of female legislators was the largest in the nation; Iowa had the second-largest jump in the Midwest. This past year, Illinois had the region’s highest proportion of women serving in the legislature (35.0 percent, sixth in the nation).

In 2019, four of the Midwest’s governors will be women: Kim Reynolds in Iowa, Laura Kelly in Kansas, Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan, and Kristi Noem in South Dakota. Reynolds and Noem are the first female governors in the history of their respective states.