State economies tied to ‘upskilling’ of workforce

Marysville, Ohio, is home to the first Honda manufacturing plant in America. It opened in 1979 with 64 workers assembling the company’s Motocross motorcycle. Auto production soon followed. Now in its 40th year of production, the original plant, along with several nearby operations, employs 13,000 workers in the northwest part of the state.

Ohio Rep. Jon Cross, whose district lies just north of the Marysville plant, has visited the facility and seen the work being done there.

“It’s highly technical, highly skilled,” he notes, more of what one might expect at a tech company rather than a car manufacturer.

More and more, that is the reality of work in manufacturing and other sectors of the Midwest’s economy — the result of advances in technology, automation and robotics.

For states, that means economic growth depends in part on having a highly skilled, adaptable workforce able to keep up with the fast pace of change.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of June, there were 1.5 million job openings in the Midwest (see map for state-by-state data), and many businesses say they can’t find enough people with the necessary skills to fill the vacancies that they have.

Parts of this region, too, have among the lowest unemployment rates in the nation; Ohio’s is actually a bit over the national average, but it’s still only 4.2 percent.

“That basically means we’re at full employment, and that’s really great for the economy,” Cross says. “But the downside is that businesses are [struggling] to grow and find new employees.

“They only think about new employees coming to go (from them).”
Great Lakes

Ohio using new dollars and partnerships to tackle problem of harmful algal blooms

With tens of millions in new state dollars to incentivize farmers, along with a list of best practices known to reduce phosphorus runoff, Ohio will spend the next two years implementing its most comprehensive effort to date to prevent harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie.

And it’s likely just the beginning of the commitment needed to tackle the problem.

In the new biennial budget, lawmakers appropriated $172 million for the H2Ohio Water Quality Plan. Money is being split among three agencies, with the Department of Agriculture using its dollars to reduce nonpoint source pollution — specifically the phosphorus runoff that comes from the commercial fertilizer and manure on farmland. (The Department of Natural Resources is focusing on wetlands restoration, the Environmental Protection Agency on failing septic systems and lead contamination in day care centers.)

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, nonpoint sources account for up to 89 percent of the total phosphorus loads in Lake Erie’s western basin, the shallowest part of the lake where harmful algal blooms have been most severe, drinking water supplies have been threatened, and recreational use has been hampered.

Over the next two years, the state Department of Agriculture will target changes in agricultural practices in the counties that make up the Maumee River watershed, one of the western basin’s major tributaries. State incentives will go to farmers that have been certified as having adopted a mix of nine “best practices” in nutrient management (soil testing, cover crops, edge-of-field buffers, etc.).

“They’ve done the work in finding what and where will get the biggest bang for the buck,” Bill Stanley, director of the Nature Conservancy of Ohio, says about implementation of the H2O plan. “That gives me hope that they’re on the right track.”

What to watch over the next two years, he says, is how many farmers decide to partner with the state: “The challenge is going to be signing up the farmers that you need at the scale that is needed.” Without enough buy-in for this voluntary certification program, he adds, the next step may have to be some type of enforcement mechanism.

Each county in the watershed will have a localized phosphorus target, as well as a goal for the number of acres that get certified. To encourage participation and help farmers improve their practices, the state is working with local soil and water conservation districts as well as agricultural commodity groups.

“We’ve never had such a dedicated, collaborative effort to move the needle forward on reducing phosphorus,” says Dorothy Pelanda, director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

Legislators will be monitoring the progress made with their new funding commitment, while also thinking about how to sustain it beyond the current budget cycle. Among the legislative proposals: create a permanent endowment fund, or ask voters to approve issuing up to $1 billion in state bonds for water quality projects over a 10-year period.

Midwest-Canada Relations

Federal legislation would boost support for diplomacy efforts of state and local governments

Recognizing the increasingly important role that state and local officials play in international relations, some U.S. lawmakers say it’s time to boost federal support for these activities.

Their idea: Create a new Office of Subnational Diplomacy within the U.S. State Department. The office would be led by an ambassador-at-large on subnational diplomacy (appointed by the president, confirmed by the U.S. Senate). The newly created office and ambassador would:

• coordinate federal support (across all agencies) for state and local international engagements;
• provide advisory assistance to support these subnational engagements;
• promote U.S. foreign policy goals through support of subnational efforts, and align those goals where appropriate; and
• maintain a database of all subnational engagements.

“Our world is becoming increasingly interconnected, and many international relationships start at a local level,” U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu of California explained in June as he introduced the bipartisan City and Diplomacy Act. He is co-sponsoring the bill along with U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson of South Carolina.

For many years, building cross-border relationships has been a central goal of the Midwest-Canada Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. This subnational group of state and provincial lawmakers sponsors legislative exchanges and works together on cross-border issues such as trade, border security and energy. Ohio Rep. Robert Cupp, co-chair of the committee, says the group has had success in “building trusting relationships, mutual understanding and practical ideas.” Additional support from the federal government, he adds, could further these goals.

Likewise, he sees benefits for the U.S. government in elevating subnational diplomacy. “[It] may enable better ‘upflow’ of state-provincial formulated solutions to the national governments,” he says, “and better inform federal decision-making.”

The Midwest-Canada Relations Committee is one of many examples of how states, local governments and their various associations have become more involved in international affairs.

Sponsors of the federal legislation point to several benefits of this activity: promoting U.S. exports (Midwestern states, for example, have trade offices around the world); encouraging greater foreign direct investments; and helping develop formal agreements on issues such as energy, the environment and public safety.

Issue Briefs cover topics of interest to the various groups and policy committees of CSG Midwest, which provides staff support to the Midwest Legislative Conference, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus, Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee.

Brief written by Tim Anderson, who can be reached at tanderson@csg.org. CSG Midwest provides staff support to the nonpartisan, binational Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus. Indiana Sen. Ed Charbonneau serves as caucus chair and Illinois Rep. Robyn Gabel as vice chair.

Ohio Rep. Robert Cupp

Euro Rep. Robert Cupp
Health & Human Services

Illinois becomes first Midwest state to cap monthly insurance co-payments for insulin

Illinois is the first Midwestern state — and the second nationwide — to cap insurance co-payments for insulin. Legislators in mid-November approved SB 667, under which most health insurance policies could charge insured individuals no more than $100 for a 30-day supply of what for diabetic patients is a life-saving medication.

That cap was set immediately upon enactment but will be adjusted annually by a specific measure: the percentage increase in the medical care component of the federal consumer price index.

The bill, which passed with Gov. J.B. Pritzker's support, also requires the Illinois departments of Insurance, Human Services, and Healthcare and Family Services to investigate insulin prices and report their findings to the public by November 2020.

Illinois Sen. Andy Manar, sponsor of SB 677, says he filed the bill after a teacher in his district talked to him about her struggle to pay for insulin for her diabetic children.

"That, for me, opened a number of questions about why someone with insurance — and as a teacher presumably someone with good insurance — why they would have to pay upwards of $800 a month for insulin?" Manar says.

Around the same time as that conversation, he says, he read about Colorado's insulin co-pay cap bill (HB 1216, which became law in May) "and put two and two together."

He had his staff get information from that bill's sponsors and began talking to his colleagues. Its swift passage "underscores just how egregious it is to charge diabetics to stay alive," Manar says, adding it's "an appropriate correction to one piece of our health care system."

Similar legislation to institute a $100/30-day co-pay cap and investigate and report on insulin prices within a year is pending in Michigan and Wisconsin. In Michigan, two bills have been introduced: HB 4701, to institute the cap, and HB 4702, to require the attorney general to investigate and report. Wisconsin's AB 411 would have the state insurance commissioner investigate and report.

Minnesota legislators are considering a different approach to insulin availability. HF 485 would create an emergency assistance program by July 1, 2020, to provide insulin to those who are unable to afford it and faced with shortages that put their lives in danger.

The Minnesota program would be funded by a fee on drug manufacturers and include a delivery mechanism allowing patients to get insulin from a pharmacy the same day they seek it. Diabetics would bring a form attesting to their need for insulin to a pharmacy and then get a 30-day supply.

Manar says he is considering legislation similar to Minnesota's for the 2020 session. "I think it's safe to say that this issue is not going to go away anytime soon," he adds.

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Nebraska study lays out options for closing broadband divide, including use of 'reverse auctions'

In rural areas that lack access to high-speed internet, the productivity of farm operations is hurt, and access to telemedicine, distance education and e-commerce opportunities is hindered.

That disconnectedness, Nebraska Sen. Curt Friesen says, is the reality for too many of his state's residents.

Officially, about 37 percent of rural Nebraskans lack access to broadband, a figure based on data from the Federal Communications Commission. But Friesen believes the percentage is even higher, because the FCC's use of census blocks to measure broadband likely overestimates access. (The federal agency is, in fact, now changing how it collects data in order to get more accurate figures.)

Friesen is hopeful, though, that a mix of recent policy changes and new recommendations can help begin closing the state's connectivity gap.

This fall, a rural broadband task force laid out a plan for state action. According to Friesen, who served on the task force and sponsored the legislation creating it (LB 994 from 2018), two strategies stand out as ways to help build out broadband in Nebraska: one, modernization of the state's Universal Service Fund (USF); and two, support for the Public Service Commission's use of "reverse auctions."

Over the last five years, remittance to Nebraska's USF has decreased by one-third due to fewer people having landline phones. However, a recent change by the Public Service Commission is expected to stabilize funding — instead of a residential user's payment being based on a percentage of his or her phone bill, it is now based on the number of connections. As a result, fees from multiple cellular phones in a single household can be collected.

A stabilized USF better positions the state to partner with telecommunications providers to expand rural broadband. Still, the size of the fund is limited, the task force says, underscoring the need for greater state accountability of USF-supported projects. One idea: Withhold state reimbursement for a project until after the buildout has occurred.

The use of "reverse auctions" also is being explored as a way to make the best use of limited dollars in the Universal Service Fund. Friesen's legislation from 2018 authorized the commission's use of reverse auctions, and at the federal level, the FCC has been experimenting with this approach as well.

In Nebraska, these auctions would be used to spur development in unserved areas where the incumbent carrier is not expanding broadband. The Public Service Commission would allow other service providers to bid on projects in these areas. The lowest bidder would then be eligible for USF dollars.

As in Nebraska, rural areas across the country are much less likely than urban areas to have fixed, high-speed internet access — 73.6 percent vs. 98.3 percent. In a 2018 study examining statewide adoption of rural broadband in Indiana, Purdue University economist Wally Tyner concluded that for every $1 dollar spent, there would be a nearly $4 return in economic growth.

Friesen says the current digital divide in Nebraska is causing many rural communities to fall behind. To close it, he adds, more public-private partnerships are needed — for example, between the state's public power districts (which already have the infrastructure in place to help with broadband buildouts) and local telecommunications suppliers.

"That communication is now occurring," Friesen says, noting one of the most important outcomes of the legislation from 2018 and the task force it created.
Future of Medicaid being shaped by state expansions, work requirements and new ideas to contain costs

1 Nebraska close to joining list of expansion states; talks continue in Kansas

Nebraska voters approved the Affordable Care Act’s Medicaid expansion in a November 2018 referendum. The state is planning to launch this expansion (to uninsured adults with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level) in October.

Right now, it’s pursuing a federal “Section 1115” waiver, named for the part of the Affordable Care Act that allows a state to include program elements different from what is allowed under federal law — provided the state can show the changes will be successful, yet budget-neutral to the federal government. Nebraska’s proposal creates two tiers of coverage: a “basic” plan for expansion-qualified adults and adults already in Medicaid as parents or caretaker relatives, and a “premium” plan that will include dental and vision appointments and over-the-counter drugs.

The premium plan will be available only to people who are working, in school, volunteering or caring for a relative; it comes with an 80-hour-per-month work requirement in order to qualify for coverage.

Medicaid expansion remains under debate in Kansas, where Gov. Laura Kelly in September established a committee to study the expansion experience in other states and to outline these findings for consideration during the 2020 legislative session.

Kansas is one of three Midwestern states that has not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act; the others are South Dakota and Wisconsin.

2 Work requirements in place, but being challenged in recent federal lawsuits

Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin have plans that require, or will require, adults to work in order to be eligible for Medicaid benefits. Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin require adults to work at least 80 hours per month.

(Ohio’s plan has been approved by the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, but won’t be implemented until 2021.)

Indiana’s and Michigan’s requirements were scheduled to begin in January, but both are subject to federal lawsuits. While details vary from state to state, these laws generally require able-bodied adults who are on Medicaid to work or be in school or in workforce training, volunteer or be looking for a job, be caring for a family member, or be in a rehab program (for a certain number of hours per week or month) in order to receive benefits.

Exemptions are made for pregnant women (or women who just gave birth), medically frail people, people in rehab, parents of young children, and people under or over a certain age.

Indiana’s requirements begin at 20 hours per month and increase to 80 hours after July. But officials in October suspended implementation pending resolution of a federal lawsuit (Rose v. Azar) alleging the requirements are “categorically outside the scope” of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ waiver authority under Section 1115, violate federal law, and are “arbitrary and capricious and an abuse of discretion.” No one will lose benefits before the lawsuit is decided, Indiana officials said.

In early December, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called for postponing implementation of her state’s work requirements, too, several days after a similar lawsuit (Young v. Azar) was filed. Legislation would need to be passed for Michigan’s requirements to be postponed or permanently removed.

3 States seek new ways to contain drug costs, improve transparency

States are taking myriad approaches to contain prescription drug costs in their Medicaid programs. Among the policy ideas highlighted in a 50-state survey benefit managers released in October by the Kaiser Family Foundation:

• Colorado plans to import drugs from Canada for resale to residents, if the federal government allows it. Similar legislation (SB 525) has been introduced in Michigan.

• Massachusetts is negotiating with drug manufacturers on supplemental rebate agreements for the highest-cost drugs. If no agreement is reached, a public process will be used to determine the target value of the drug and improve transparency. Manufacturers also may be referred to the state Health Policy Commission for further accountability. The state anticipates these reforms will save the Medicaid program $70 million in FY 2020.

• New York’s Medicaid drug cap limits aggregate drug costs to an annual trend factor. For each year that costs exceed the allowable cap, the state negotiates enhanced rebates with the drug manufacturer and may refer drugs to the Drug Utilization Review Board for additional review.

Among Midwestern states, Kansas may place a temporary prior-authorization requirement on new drugs that meet certain criteria until the state’s Drug Utilization Review Committee is able to adopt a more permanent policy.

States are also scrutinizing pharmacy benefit managers. The position is designed to leverage the aggregate purchasing power of health insurance policyholders by negotiating price discounts with pharmacies or prescription home-delivery services, and rebates from pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Kansas, North Dakota and Ohio regulated them before 2019 and were joined this year by Nebraska and South Dakota. Legislation to regulate pharmacy benefit managers and require annual price transparency reports remains pending in Michigan and Wisconsin. Michigan also is proposing to eliminate the use of Medicaid health plans’ pharmacy benefit managers and instead use a fee-for-service model with a single PBM from the state.

State and local Medicaid spending on prescription drugs, 2014-2018

Medicaid work requirements in Midwest (December 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Applies to adults in expansion</th>
<th>Applies to adults in traditional Medicaid</th>
<th>Ages exempt?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Approved, pending</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Approved, pending</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>63+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Approved, pending</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Pending</td>
<td>No expansion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Approved, but not implemented</td>
<td>No expansion</td>
<td>Yes (childless adults)</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

Enrollment in Medicaid/Children’s Health Insurance Program, as of August 2019 (% change since 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Medicaid expansion pending</th>
<th>Medicaid expansion implemented</th>
<th>Medicaid expansion not implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>State has implemented expansion of Medicaid to cover more people under public insurance program</td>
<td>State has not expanded Medicaid</td>
<td>Medicaid expansion to be implemented by next year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Federal Expenditure</th>
<th>Medicaid Expenditure</th>
<th>Medicaid Expansion Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$9.6 billion</td>
<td>$11.6 billion</td>
<td>$2.0 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$10.8 billion</td>
<td>$12.5 billion</td>
<td>$1.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$11.0 billion</td>
<td>$12.7 billion</td>
<td>$1.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$11.2 billion</td>
<td>$12.9 billion</td>
<td>$1.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$15.6 billion</td>
<td>$17.4 billion</td>
<td>$1.8 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, “National Health Expenditure Data”

Article written by Jon Davis, CSG Midwest policy analyst. He can be reached at jdavis@csg.org.
Impeachment and the states: A look at the history, provisions in place

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

I t’s a word and a power of the legislative branch most commonly associated these days with removing a U.S. president from office.

But “impeachment” not only appears in nearly all of the nation’s state constitutions, its inclusion in them — as a check against overreach or abuses of power by state-level executive and judicial branches — predated the writing of the U.S. Constitution.

“Ten of the 12 state constitutions at the time already had impeachment language in them,” notes Frank Bowman, a professor at the University of Missouri School of Law.

The reason: The drafters of those state constitutions were well-versed in English history, and aware of how and why Parliament used the threat of removing a monarch’s ministers from office as a way to curb abuses of power.

In his book “High Crimes and Misdemeanors: A History of Impeachment for the Age of Trump,” Bowman traces this tool of the legislative branch back to the 14th century. And he uses impeachment’s centuries-long history to help explain what it is, and isn’t.

“I think a lot of times it’s wrongly viewed as a criminal process, and seen through that lens,” Bowman says. “But it’s not that. It’s about checks and balances and finding the right constitutional balance. “It’s about good governance.”

Today, every U.S. state constitution except Oregon’s allows for the legislative impeachment of governors, judges and other state officials. In the 11-state Midwest, the process laid out in most state constitutions is a familiar one: impeachment by the house, removal from office by the senate (see map).

But there are some notable exceptions and differences:
- Nebraska’s legislative branch does not have the power to remove someone from office for an impeachment offense. The unicameral legislature only can impeach. The case then goes to the Nebraska Supreme Court, where two-thirds of the justices must vote to remove an individual from office. (If a Supreme Court justice has been impeached, then seven District Court judges are randomly chosen to hear the case.)
  - A two-thirds vote of the Indiana House is required to impeach. In other midwestern states, only a simple-majority vote is needed.
  - In every Midwestern state where the senate has the power to convict and remove someone from office, a two-thirds vote is required. In Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, North Dakota and South Dakota, this means two-thirds of the “elected” members. The threshold is two-thirds of the members present in Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Most state constitutions in the Midwest list one or more grounds for impeachment — for example, crimes, misdemeanors, malfeasance, and/or corrupt conduct. The North Dakota and South Dakota constitutions also specify “drunkenness” as an impeachable offense. In Nebraska, officials are “liable to impeachment” not only for their conduct while in office, but also “in pursuit of such office.”

But in Illinois, the Constitution does not list specific grounds for impeachment; it’s instead left to House investigators “to determine the existence of cause.” A decade ago, the Illinois House articles of impeachment against Gov. Rod Blagojevich cited 13 instances of abuse of power. The state Senate then voted unanimously to remove Blagojevich from office.

Six other governors in U.S. history, including Nebraska Gov. David Butler (in 1871), have been impeached and removed from office by a state legislative branch, according to Ballotpedia.

Impeachment process in Midwest

Restorative justice options in the Midwest as of June 2019

Support for restorative justice in Midwestern state laws (as of June 2019)

High (restorative justice is mentioned in 9 or more laws)
Moderate (restorative justice is mentioned in 3-7 laws)
Low (restorative justice is mentioned in 1 or 2 laws)
None

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: Which Midwestern states have restorative justice programs in state law?

Restorative justice programs are gaining traction in the Midwest as a way to heal wounds caused by criminal actions, reconcile offenders and their victims, and keep some offenders from entering the criminal justice system.

Compared to traditional models of justice, restorative justice “seeks to balance the needs of the victim, offender and community by repairing the harm caused by delinquent acts,” according to “Restorative Justice in the States: An Analysis of Statutory Legislation and Policy.” (This study appeared in the fall 2016 edition of Justice Policy Journal, published by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.)

While restorative justice programs vary from state to state, they generally include holding juvenile offenders accountable for their offense, involving victims and the community in the justice process, obligating the offender to pay restitution to the victim and/or a victims’ fund, improving the juvenile’s ability to live more productively and responsibly in the community, and securing safer communities.

Shannon Silva, an assistant professor in the University of Denver’s Graduate School of Social Work, tracks state laws and codes incorporating ideas of restorative justice. She designates the level of state support for restorative justice by tracking the number of laws supporting its use by name.

By her measure, all Midwestern states except Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota support restorative justice: Minnesota is the only high-support state (nine citations); Illinois (three), Indiana (five), Nebraska (six) and Ohio (six) are moderate; Kansas (one), Michigan (one), and Wisconsin (two) are low.

Iowa’s Department of Corrections has a restorative justice option among its victim services, however, and some counties operate “victim-offender reconciliation programs.” Michigan incorporates restorative justice into its K-12 school policy: HB 5619 became law in December 2016, allowing school districts to depart from “zero-tolerance” discipline. It requires school boards to consider using “restorative practices” instead of suspensions or expulsions, and describes those practices in restorative justice language.

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: csginfo@csg.org or 630.922.1922.
With labor markets tight, state legislators eye policies to ‘upskill’ workers

that young adult coming out of high school,” says Sue Ellspermann, president of Indiana’s Ivy Tech Community College, which has 18 campuses across the state. “But the recognition is that Indiana, like most Midwestern states, cannot meet their attainment goals and expectations of employers without a very strong adult strategy.”

New Ohio goal: Award 10,000 ‘micro degrees’ every year to workers

More than 27 million U.S. adults have completed some college but lack a credential or degree, and more than 63 million Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 have no education beyond high school. In the Midwest, state educational attainment rates — the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who have a postsecondary degree or credential — ranges from 43.3 percent in South Dakota to 54.8 percent in Minnesota (see table on this page for state-by-state numbers).

Attainment rates matter because an increasing higher percentage of U.S. jobs requires some kind of education or training beyond high school. For state policymakers worried about the gap in the number of available jobs vs. the number of qualified job applicants, the good news is this: There is a large pool of potentially new postsecondary degree earners. The issue is how businesses and policymakers get this population to seek degrees or certificates that boost workforce skills.

Part of the policy solution in Ohio, Rep. Cross believes, should be improving workers’ access to micro-credentials. Gov. Mike DeWine agrees. His goal for the state is to have 10,000 workers complete some kind of micro degree every year.

With that objective in mind, Ohio legislators appropriated $30 million a year in the state’s new biennial budget for micro-credentialing, and in September, the state launched a new program called “TechCred.”

Under TechCred, employers will get reimbursed up to $2,000 for the costs associated with a worker earning a credential in a high-demand field. The credential must be industry-recognized and technology-focused, and take less than one year to complete.

“We want to help businesses do that — retrain employees, upskill them and get them in better positions that lead to better pay,” Cross says. “And then the businesses can backfill entry-level positions. It’s all about trying to get more people into the workforce and filling more jobs.”

Cross is the sponsor of legislation, HB 2, that would codify TechCred in state statute. The bill also provides the same tuition reimbursement for individuals to pursue an industry-recognized micro-credential in a high-demand field, and it encourages the creation of industry sector partnerships to better develop and target training programs to match business needs. (As of early December, versions of HB 2 had passed the House and Senate.)

Like Cross in Ohio, Feyen sees micro-credentialing as a useful tool in helping Wisconsin close its skills gap. This year, he sponsored a micro-credential bill that would create a $2 million grant program for nonprofits and colleges or universities to provide education in high-demand fields to upskill the state’s unemployed and underemployed workers.

That legislation, SB 14, is modeled after a pilot program at Lakeshore Technical College in eastern Wisconsin. Seeing the success of that program, Feyen wants to take it statewide. “It keeps our workforce more educated and ready to take on new challenges,” he says, “and it keeps companies moving in the right direction.”

According to Feyen, his micro-credentialing bill would complement several larger initiatives already under way in Wisconsin, including Fast Forward, which began in 2013 and has since provided millions of dollars in job-training grants to employers and technical colleges.

One particular emphasis of this upskilling and retraining of workers, he says, should be technology. In Wisconsin, businesses will need an additional 3,000 workers with these skills over the next three to five years.

“The digital world is not going away,” Feyen says. “It’s just getting more advanced all the time, so we need to make sure there are programs in place that our employers have access to get training for their employees to keep pace.”

Indiana’s community colleges adjust to meet needs of adult students

Indiana’s Ivy Tech Community System, Ellspermann understands the central role of two-year institutions in job training and workforce development — particularly for non-traditional students.

A former state legislator and lieutenant governor, she had a hand in the development of programs that her community college now delivers to students across the state. One of these is Next Level Jobs, which started in 2017.

There are two major components of the Next Level Jobs:

1) Workforce Ready Grants, which provide free community college to adult-age workers who receive certificates in a high-demand job in one of five high-growth sectors: advanced manufacturing, building and construction, health and life sciences, IT and business services, and transportation and logistics.

2) Employer Training Grants, which reimburse employers up to $50,000 for the costs related to training workers in high-growth sectors (the same sectors identified for Workforce Ready Grants, plus agriculture).

With each of these grant programs, Indiana is attempting to get workers into higher-wage jobs. Crucial to the success of Next Level Jobs is the partnership between businesses and community colleges.

“When people get degrees or certificates from community colleges, that tends to be a good investment and pays off.”

Paul Osterman, co-director, MIT Sloan Institute for Work and Employment

State educational attainment rates and goals: % of individuals, ages 25 to 64, with postsecondary degree or credential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>State attainment goal/target year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>60% by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>60% by 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>70% by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>60% by 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>60% by 2030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>70% by 2025*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>No state goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>65% by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>65% by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>65% by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>60% by 2027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Minnesota’s attainment goal is for ages 25 to 44.

Source: Lumina Foundation

Cover Story

This page features a cover story focusing on how states are working to improve adult education and workforce development. It highlights examples from Ohio and Wisconsin, where state legislators are considering policies to “upskill” workers. The cover story includes insights from state leaders and education advocates about the importance of credentialing as a tool to support workforce needs.

The story addresses the challenge of the growing workforce demand and the need for adult learners to gain the necessary skills to meet those demands. It features examples of successful programs, such as Ohio’s TechCred and Wisconsin’s Next Level Jobs, which aim to bridge gaps in the workforce by offering micro-credentials and other education pathways.

The cover story also discusses the broader issue of educational attainment rates across the Midwest and highlights the significance of these rates in the context of economic development and job growth. It notes the importance of partnerships between education providers and employers to ensure that training programs align with the needs of the labor market.

The story concludes with quotes from state legislators and education leaders who are championing policies to support adult learners and the workforce. It emphasizes the need for continued investment in adult education and workforce initiatives to maintain economic viability and competitiveness in the face of a rapidly changing job market.
Meanwhile, Indiana’s community colleges have developed programs of their own to help adult students. One example is Ivy Tech’s Achieve Your Degree program, a school-business partnership that offers employees the opportunity to receive a community college education at minimal cost.

“I think of it as tuition reimbursement 2.0,” Ellspermann says. “Working with employers that provide tuition assistance, Ivy Tech defers student tuition and then seeks payment directly from the business. Currently, 180 companies use the program to upskill their workers.

“In a 3 percent unemployment pool, there are not a lot of unemployed adults out there to bring in, so if [businesses] want a more skilled workforce, they are going to have to use their own employees and skill them up to be even more productive and more valuable for the organization,” Ellspermann says.

“To the extent that they can work with their community college and postsecondary system, it’s a win for all. But they need to look at ways to shift the burden of the tuition off the employee and find a way to make it easier for the employees to come back [to school].”

The job of the community college, she adds, is to reinvent itself to help meet the needs of these workers/students.

Recognizing that 25 percent of its students have dependent children, for example, Ivy Tech has created a Single Mother’s initiative to help parents persist in higher education — not only through targeted academic supports, but with wraparound services as well.

Ellspermann points to other examples of helping adult workers/students: 1) the use of stackable credentials, which provide individuals with short-term certificates while creating a pathway to an associate’s degree; and 2) more scheduling options, such as the availability of eight-week-long courses.

“Adults have a much more challenging time doing college in the way we have [traditionally offered it],” Ellspermann says, adding that the eight-week model for courses has led to greater success among these learners.

Along with investing more in community colleges, Osterman says, states can partner with businesses and provide new incentives for companies to train or retrain workers. (Evidence points to a decline in employment-based training activity, he notes).

“The problem is not the lack of good ideas or best practices, [on job training],” he says. “The problem is scale and resources and the willingness to insist on quality. … Those are the issues [policymakers should] focus on.”

Sue Ellspermann, president, Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana

---

**Notable new workforce bills, laws and programs in Midwest**

**Illinois creates framework for adult vocational scholarship program**

Signed into law in August, SB 1767 creates a scholarship program for Illinois residents 30 and older who are unemployed and pursuing community college-based workforce training that results in a certificate or associate’s degree. Up to $2,000 per year can be provided to a student. (SB 1767 provides the framework to create the program; a budget appropriation is still needed.)

**Indiana has new governor’s cabinet to guide workforce, job training programs**

In 2018, Indiana lawmakers established the Governor’s Workforce Cabinet (SB 39). Among its duties: align Indiana’s workforce and education systems and evaluate the effectiveness of state workforce programs. The cabinet also has been seeking input from Indiana’s 12 “economic growth regions” on how to use federal Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act funds.

**Iowa helps individuals seek careers in high-demand fields**

A part of Iowa’s Future Ready initiative, the Last-Dollar Scholarship Program provides tuition assistance for up to two years to students (including incumbent or unemployed workers) who obtain degrees, diplomas and credentials in high-demand fields such as health care, advanced manufacturing and construction. Legislators appropriated $53 million this year for the program.

**Kansas accelerates opportunities for residents lacking a high school diploma**

The Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas Act (SB 199) was signed into law in May 2019. It provides a path for Kansans without a high school diploma to participate in technical college classes and earn an industry-recognized technical certificate, while they also are working toward their high school equivalency degree.

**Michigan bills would provide tuition-free path for displaced workers**

Various legislative proposals in Michigan would create MI-Connect. By covering tuition costs after all other sources of financial aid have been applied, the last-dollar scholarship program would provide a tuition-free path for displaced and incumbent workers to return to school and earn an industry certificate or associate’s degree in an in-demand field.

**Minnesota provides employment-based dual training in high-growth sectors**

Modelled after Germany’s dual-training model, Minnesota’s PIPELINE program combines classroom learning with on-the-job training. The state covers employer costs to train existing workers in four high-growth industries: advanced manufacturing, agriculture, health care and information technology. Nearly $3.9 million in PIPELINE grants were made available this year.

**Nebraska expands reach of Community College Gap Assistance grants**

Since 2016, Nebraska has offered Community College Gap Assistance grants to low-income students enrolled in non-credit courses of study that are not eligible for federal Pell Grants. This year, the Legislature approved a bill (LB 140) that extends this assistance to students enrolled in for-credit education programs related to a high-demand occupation.

**Scholarships, loan repayments target North Dakota’s workforce shortage**

In an effort to address a persistent workforce shortage, North Dakota is using a mix of state and private-sector dollars to provide targeted scholarships and loan repayments. Under HB 1170, signed into law in April, an individual student or worker will be eligible to receive up to $17,000. He or she must be employed or pursuing credentials in a high-demand profession.

**Ohio bill would streamline business-led, job-training certificate programs**

Ohio’s HB 4, passed by the House in June, would allow businesses to create job-training certificate programs by working with the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation. The governor’s office would vet each proposal and work with education officials to develop the curriculum, standards or materials necessary for the certificate or certificate program.

**More federal dollars will allow Saskatchewan to expand workforce programs**

Two recent agreements between Saskatchewan and the federal government of Canada will allow for a greater investment in the province’s workforce. Over the next six years, close to $550 million will go to apprenticeship training, employment assistance for persons with disabilities, adult basic education, help for displaced workers and other job-training initiatives.

**South Dakota deepens investment in registered apprenticeship programs**

In November, South Dakota’s Department of Labor and Regulation provided $370,000 in additional funds for the state’s registered apprenticeship programs. Priority will be given to businesses with apprenticeship programs for the state’s under-represented workforce populations, including young adults, Native Americans and individuals with disabilities.

**Wisconsin legislation seeks tuition assistance for adult college students**

Several workforce development bills are under consideration in Wisconsin to encourage adults without postsecondary credentials to earn them. Among them are AB 356/AB 481, which would establish scholarships for adults 25 years old. Under these companion measures, the state would cover tuition needs unmet by other forms of aid.
Nebraska Sen. Mike Hilgers
First-term lawmaker has emerged as institutional leader while pursuing ‘win-win’ policies in areas such as transportation and health care
by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

Q: One of the first big questions for Mike Hilgers and his wife, Heather, to answer was this: Where do we want to settle down and raise a family?
A: Heather is not a native of Nebraska, and Mike, though from Omaha, had gone to law school in Chicago, practiced law in Dallas, and worked for a federal judge in New Orleans. “There are a lot of Nebraskans who leave and never come home,” he notes. Not Hilgers, though. He and Heather decided to put down their roots in Nebraska’s capital city of Lincoln, and that led to another question: How do we make it a better place to live?

Q: “When you start to invest in your community — building a business, starting a family, volunteering at your church, caring about your local schools — it becomes a natural extension to start thinking about the decisions being made by elected leaders,” Hilgers says. “They have such a big impact.”
A: “So as a Nebraskan who came back home, I saw the Unicameral Legislature as a place where I could add value and contribute to the state.”

Q: Elected in 2016, he’s entering the final year of his first term in Nebraska’s uniquely nonpartisan, unicameral system. It’s been a busy few years, to say the least. Outside the Legislature, Mike and Heather Hilgers have four young children, and the law firm that he started in Lincoln in 2011 has taken off: For three straight years, Hilgers Graben PLLC has been recognized by Inc. Magazine as one of the nation’s 5,000 fastest-growing private companies.

A: Inside the Legislature, Hilgers has emerged as an institutional leader, first as chair of the Rules Committee, now as chair of the Executive Board. He’s also led on policy — from bills that found new efficiencies and innovations in financing Nebraska’s transportation projects, to legislation that has expanded the availability of direct primary care.

Q: Those measures, Hilgers says, reflect his legislative philosophy: avoid “zero sum” solutions, and instead focus on finding “win-wins.”
A: “Even on issues that tend to have some fight over them,” he says, “you can find win-wins that really will make a difference in people’s lives.”

Q: In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Sen. Hilgers discussed his views on legislating and leadership, as well as the 2020 session in the Unicameral Legislature. Here are excerpts.

Q: Have you talked about trying to avoid “zero sum” policy outcomes and instead focusing on “win wins.” How do you apply that vision to something as contentious as tax reform, which is expected to be a big issue in Nebraska’s 2020 legislative session?
A: Reducing the overall tax burden has been one of the things I want to see done during my time in the Legislature. It is hard to immediately cut a lot out of any budget, whether it is a business, family or government, in a short amount of time. But tax reform that is disciplined, that does it through managed growth and thoughtful choices about spending, can sustainably reduce taxes.

Q: So in general, my theory on tax reform is largely to do it through [excess] cash flow over time. Otherwise, it becomes zero sum, where you’re giving something to someone, but you’re doing by taking from some other funding source or by raising taxes somewhere else.
A: There are quite a few that I would point to, and they all are really qualities that you would want in any relationship — they’re just heightened in the legislative process. So first I’d say humility and modesty are critical, understanding that there’s always more information out there and accepting that you might be wrong. Part of that, too, is having the ability to authentically listen to other people, so that you try and understand where they’re coming from.

Q: You do that while knowing what you believe in and why you believe it. Stand up for your principles while at the same time understanding there are a lot of different issues and ways those principles can be applied. That allows you to be innovative and think outside of your own comfort zone, while sticking with your foundational beliefs.
A: I also think it’s really important not to personalize disputes. When you disagree with someone, it’s easy to get fired up and get defensive. So it can be hard not to take things personally. But it’s like what they say about a cornerback in football, “Don’t let the last play beat you.” Well, it’s the same in the Legislature. Put the last debate, the last issue, aside and focus on the next one.

Q: What do you view as some of the key leadership qualities in the legislative environment?
A: It think it starts with gaining a reputation for knowing what you’re talking about and doing your homework, and then being willing to listen and work with people. That creates the conditions for leadership.

Q: It’s also important to keep your word. If you tell someone you’re going to be with them, you’ve got to be with them. And you’ve got to be straight with people as well. If I am against your bill, I try to make sure you know upfront and why. You also need to be seen as someone who treat others fairly. You know there’s going to be fights or debates about the substance of issues, so you need to take care of all the process issues. Avoid things that surprise people and that can sour relationships.
In Ohio, state-led commission helps promote culture of fatherhood

Work includes partnerships with state agencies, aid for community programs

by Ohio Rep. Riordan McClain (rep87@ohiohouse.gov)

In Ohio and around the United States, we are facing a fatherhood crisis. According to 2017 U.S. Census Bureau data, one in four American children are being raised without a father in the home. That ratio translates into 19.7 million children—close to 20 million of the nation's young people lacking a relationship with not just their father, but any father figure in the home. There is no doubt that many of the societal and criminal issues we deal with as state legislatures stem from this fact.

What can government do?

We can't mandate fatherhood, so how do we break the cycle of broken relationships and help men to be good fathers when they may not have been shown an example of what that looks like by their father? In Ohio, we are making an attempt. We have a state commission that oversees a limited amount of grant dollars to partner with community-based fatherhood programs.

Back in 1999, Peter Lawson Jones (then an Ohio state representative) and others had the vision and foresight to advocate for including fatherhood initiatives in our state budget. The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) was thus created and funded through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds. Funding fluctuated in the early years, with the program even being put on hold in some years. However, since 2007, the commission has been steadily funded and been able to award grants to community-based fatherhood programs across the state.

OCF’s mission: Enhance the well-being of Ohio's children by providing opportunities for fathers to become better parents, partners and providers. Its work includes:

• developing policy recommendations,
• funding nonprofit/father-based community organizations,
• training fatherhood practitioners to more effectively deliver programming, and
• bringing public awareness to the important role fathers play in their children's lives.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my public service in the Ohio legislature has been the opportunity to serve on this commission.

The research is clear and convincing — the presence of a healthy and responsible father supports positive outcomes in children.

We need people to first understand their role as a father, but then to also accept this responsibility and navigate barriers to custody or stability. In short, we want to equip them with the tools they need to be a good dad.

We are constantly rewarded to hear stories of men who have been impacted by the amazing work done by our community-based partners. Having this relational infrastructure in place to meet the various needs of young fathers is critical to making a difference.

The OCF is currently funding eight of these community-based programs.

In addition, the commission is working in partnership with a number of different state agencies. Here are some examples of that work.

• Fathers are essential to healthy birth outcomes and protecting infants. With that in mind, the OCF works with the Ohio Department of Health and the Office of Medicaid to address high rates of infant mortality and racial disparities in birth outcomes.

• State-funded outreach and services are targeted to nine counties with the highest disparities. The OCF has worked with other state agencies on the rules for visits to the homes of expectant mothers and fathers.

• The OCF works with the Ohio Office of Child Support on various policies and strategies to ensure that state services focus on the best interest of children.

• In partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction, the OCF works on child-support strategies for incarcerated, noncustodial parents.

• The OCF works with the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiative to ensure that state-funded community programs throughout Ohio work in unison to provide much-needed services.

• The OCF works with the Ohio Office of Families and Children on family engagement strategies — for example, development of a toolkit for use by the state's child-welfare social workers.

The research is clear and convincing — the presence of a healthy and responsible father supports positive outcomes in children.

More support in new state budget

Until 2019, the OCF lacked sufficient resources to fund prevention and early-intervention programming; however, the current biennial budget increased OCF funds thanks to support from our state’s executive and legislative branches. As a result, the OCF is focusing on programs that prevent premature fatherhood (through work in our state’s middle and high schools) and that equip low-income fathers with the tools they need to provide a secure foundation (emotionally, spiritually, physically and financially) for their children.

The research is clear and convincing — the presence of a healthy and responsible father supports positive outcomes in children. And now more than ever before, the OCF has the backing of our state political leaders to spread this message and help fathers become better parents, partners and providers.

Many states have been looking to Ohio to determine how they can replicate a state fatherhood commission, coalition or initiative.

Considering the many social ills afflicting society today — the drug epidemic, human trafficking, stressed foster care systems, poverty, out-of-wedlock births, incarceration, youth academic and behavioral challenges, etc. — forming a commission on fatherhood makes sense as part of a state’s broader policy response. Such a commission can bring new funding, research and strategies to efforts that aim to enhance the well-being of children.

As a legislator, I’m focused on improving the culture of fatherhood not only by funding community-based programs, but by improving our statutes regarding custody and other parental rights.

Please feel free to reach out to me or our OCF executive director, Kimberly Dent, with questions you have about supporting fatherhood initiatives in your state.

Rep. Riordan McClain has been a member of the Ohio House since 2018 and was appointed to the Commission on Fatherhood in early 2019. He also is a 2019 graduate of CSG Midwest’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development. He can be reached at rep87@ohiohouse.gov. Kimberly Dent, executive director of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, can be reached at FATHERS@jfs.ohio.gov.

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 First Person article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csz.org.
Great Lakes legislators developing model policies to control nutrient pollution

How can states and provinces better address the problem of nutrient pollution and its impact on water quality?

Tackling that difficult policy question is the goal of a new task force of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus — the binational, nonpartisan group of lawmakers that receives staff support from The Council of State Governments. The Task Force on Nutrients has been charged with developing a GLLC resolution and action plan, along with model policies for consideration by state and provincial legislatures.

Here is a state-by-state list of the task force:

- Illinois — Reps. Tim Butler and Anna Moeller
- Indiana — Reps. David Abbott and Mara Candelaria Reardon and Sen. Mike Bohacek
- Ohio — Reps. Paula Hicks-Hudson and Michael Sheehy and Sen. Theresa Gavarone
- Ontario — MPP Jennifer French
- Pennsylvania — Reps. Mark Keller and Dan Moul
- Québec — MNA Gilles Bélanger

Policy institute held in Detroit

To help inform and kick off the task force’s work, the GLLC recently convened its first-ever Patricia Birkholz Institute for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Policy. Participants met in Detroit, where they spent several days learning from experts and discussing the problem of nutrient pollution and its impact on water quality.

Along with these discussions, attendees toured a wastewater treatment plant and biosolids drying facility to learn about innovative practices in controlling nutrient pollution from point sources. They also visited Darling Farms in Monroe County, Mich., to learn about best management practices for reducing nutrient pollution from farms (nonpoint sources). This family farm participates in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program. Pictured (from left to right) are Illinois Rep. Tim Butler, Indiana Rep. David Abbott, Québec MNA Gilles Bélanger, Minnesota Sen. Carrie Ruud and Illinois Rep. Anna Moeller. The visit to Darling Farms was part of this fall’s Patricia Birkholz Institute for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Policy.

Future of workforce focus of upcoming webinar series

In a series of five webinars held between January and June, the Midwestern Legislative Conference Economic Development Committee will explore policies that help address the unique workforce challenges of specific populations in the region’s labor market.

All legislators and legislative staff are encouraged to participate. Please visit csgmidwest.org or contact Laura Tomaka, CSG Midwest staff liaison for the committee, at ltomaka@csg.org for exact times and dates.

Among the workforce populations to be explored: ex-offenders, members of the military and their families, individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities, and workers displaced by changing technologies or skill demands.
Are you politician- or constituent-focused?

Constituents elected you to represent them — to help ensure their safety, health, comfort and quality of life. They have put their lives, and their futures, in your hands. For this reason, you are invited to speak at schools, clubs, and business and community events.

So when you speak to constituents, what do you say? What do they hope to hear? What do they need to hear?

Talking about yourself: ‘politician-focused’

If you are like many representatives, you talk about what you are doing in the capitol — the bills you’ve passed, the battles you’ve fought in committee or on the floor, etc. You need to give all the details. Otherwise, how will your constituents know how hard you are working, right? It’s good for them to know you are busy, but they don’t really care.

You might call this politician-focused.

Talking about them: ‘constituent-focused’

If you focus on them, your constituents, then you talk about the new challenges they may face, the new opportunities they will have or the coming changes to their lives. Your constituents don’t want you to tell them everything. They want you to be like their doctor. They want you to take their pulse, ask how they are doing, and talk to them about their future. They want you to know them, care about them, and then help them.

When you speak to their world, you are constituent-focused.

Ask, listen, respond ... and then ask again

To be constituent-focused, caring and listening can serve as better tools than talking.

Remember, too, that few people are genuinely interested in the grisly details of the sausage-making factory. You don’t need to prove you are a politician. They already know that, don’t they? You need to prove you are a human being. To show your humanity, ask questions. How are their families and jobs? Their schools? Their roads? What are their hopes, successes and concerns?

And if a constituent asks a question like, “What have you been doing in the legislature?” Consider it a trick question. Yes, you have worked hard and are proud of what you have been doing. But, no, they don’t really want to know what you have been doing. What they really mean is: “What have you done in the legislature for me?”

Your best answer may be short and followed by a clarifying question: “Your question is important, and my answer may be way more information than you want. Can you tell me your specific interest?”

They will feel like you care.

A change in pronouns can be a ‘game changer’

How can you frame your message so people will listen? A few small changes can make a big difference in your impact. Go back to high school English class. Remember sentence structure? Most sentences have a subject and an object. The subject takes the action. The object is … an object.

Constituents don’t want to be the object.

To make sure you are focusing on them, connecting with them and getting them interested in what you say, make them the subject. Literally, or at least grammatically.

You can force a change in your speaking style with one simple step: Don’t begin your sentences with first-person pronouns. These are “politician-focused” sentences talking about yourself:

We had great success in the last session.
We got some things done that we are proud of.
Our new laws will make a difference.
I will keep you informed about what I am doing!

If “I,” “we” or “our” are the subjects in your message, then what you say is about you! You are the hero in your sentences. You are focused on you. Consider making them, your constituents, the subjects of your sentences and the heroes of your stories, by starting “constituent-focused” sentences talking about yourself:

We got some things done that you are proud of.
Their benefits will grow in the future.

Your leadership and participation in the community’s safety program will make a difference to your children.

Your job opportunities will be greater because of the economic impact of this decision.

Your family will have access to better choices. Their benefits will grow in the future.

Using “you” and “your” (or “they” and “their”) in your interactions is a game changer. Constituents, stakeholders and even fellow legislators will listen better when you frame your message from their perspective.

Like anything, this adjustment in focus will take time. If you practice, you will see a difference. Use constituent-focus in emails, subject lines, newsletters, conversations and the speeches you deliver. It will change the way people see you. It will change your impact on their lives.

Guest Author: Bill Graham

Bill Graham delivers communication training, speeches and consulting to clients in the public and private sectors. He is president of Graham Corporate Communications and regularly collaborates with Joe Thomas at Impact Advantage. Graham has been a member of the BILLD faculty since 2013.

In November, former Michigan Sen. Gilda Jacobs (BILLD class of 1999) was inducted into the Michigan HERStory Hall of Fame — 20 years after attending BILLD as a first-year member of the Michigan House. She was the first woman in her state’s history to serve as a floor leader in either legislative chamber. After two House terms, Jacobs served in the Senate until 2010. Since 2011, Jacobs has been president and CEO of the Michigan League for Public Policy, a nonpartisan policy institute that focuses on how policy impacts the state’s low-income residents.

In May, former Kansas Sen. Jay Emler (class of 2002) became deputy attorney general and chief information security officer for Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, (a 2001 BILLD graduate). Prior to this position, Emler had been a member of the Kansas Corporation Commission. He served in the Kansas Senate from 2001 to 2014, and was majority leader for the final four years of his tenure. While in the Legislature, Emler was chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference in 2009 and national chair of The Council of State Governments in 2012.

Former Illinois Rep. Karen Yarbrough (class of 2002) left the Illinois House, where she was an assistant majority leader, to serve county government. In 2012, she was elected Cook County recorder of deeds, a position she held until being elected Cook County clerk in 2018. She is the first female and African American to hold this position.

In 2018, former Nebraska Sen. Jim Smith (class of 2011) left the Legislature during his eighth year in office to serve as the first executive director of Blueprint Nebraska. In this position, he is helping devise a comprehensive, citizen-led, long-term economic development strategy for Nebraska.
New Wisconsin law enshrines Medicaid telehealth parity

Wisconsin became the latest Midwestern state to enact Medicaid telehealth payment parity legislation when Gov. Tony Evers signed SB 380 in November.

Under the new law, the Department of Health Services must treat and pay telehealth services — including remote patient treatment, care and monitoring, consultation and diagnosis — delivered via audio/video connection the same as in-person services. This includes the electronic collection and sharing of clinical information, more commonly known as “store and forward.”

The law ensures that Medicaid reimburses for the same telehealth services as Medicare, and allows patients to get telehealth care in non-clinical locations such as homes or schools. It also eliminates requirements for telehealth providers to get extra certifications or meet extra requirements just because a service is provided via telehealth.

According to the Center for Connected Health Policy, all Midwestern states reimburse for live video services while Wisconsin and Minnesota are the only ones reimbursing for “store and forward.” Five states — Iowa, Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio and South Dakota — don’t reimburse for remote patient monitoring, according to the center.

Kansasc, Nebraska get high marks for laws to prevent sex trafficking

Kansas and Nebraska have among the strongest laws in the nation to prevent sex trafficking of minors and to help victims of these crimes, according to the advocacy group Shared Hope International.

Both of those Midwestern states received “A” grades in the group’s national report card for 2019. These grades are based on 41 components of state law — for example, the criminal penalties for perpetrators and facilitators of trafficking crimes; the types of legal protections and services provided to victims; and the investigatory tools given to law enforcement.

Nebraska was identified as the most improved state in the nation. The reason: a policy change in 2019 that ensures specialized interventions and responses in all sex-trafficking cases involving a minor.

Despite many policy advances over the past decade, Shared Hope International says, gaps in state law still exist. Among them: victims’ lack of access to restorative services outside the juvenile justice system. In the Midwest, six states were given grades of “F.” Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The states of North Dakota and Ohio were given a “C” by Shared Hope International; South Dakota was given a “D.”

Nebraska Unicameral speaker: Should there be more senators?

With the 2020 Census looming, the speaker of Nebraska’s Unicameral legislature is proposing expanding the body from 49 to 55 senators.

As in states across the country, Nebraska continues to experience a demographic shift, with urban areas gaining in population compared to rural regions. One consequence of this demographic shift: larger and larger rural legislative districts in the central and western parts of Nebraska. Speaker Jim Scheer told the Omaha World-Herald that the growing geographic size of districts makes it more likely for constituents to lose contact with their state senator.

Nebraska’s Constitution currently allows for between 30 and 50 senators. The Unicameral had 43 senators from its establishment in 1913 until 1963, when the chamber increased its membership to the current 49, the World-Herald reports. Any change in the number of senators above 50 would require a constitutional amendment approved by the state’s voters.

Nebraska has the smallest number of state legislators in the nation. New Hampshire has the most — 424. In the Midwest, the number of legislators ranges from Nebraska’s low of 49 to Minnesota’s high of 201.

New rules in Illinois ban schools’ use of isolated seclusion

Under emergency rules established this fall, the Illinois Board of Education banned the use of isolated seclusion by schools, and new legislation to codify the ban is expected in 2020.

The state actions are the result of an investigation by the Chicago Tribune and ProPublica that documented more than 20,000 incidents of isolated seclusion over the past 15 months.

Under existing state law, this practice is only permitted if a student poses a safety threat. But according to the Chicago Tribune’s investigation, in many cases, students were getting “isolated timeouts” for disobedience or refusing to do schoolwork.

The use of “timeouts” by schools — separating a student from classmates with a trained adult in the classroom — is still permitted. It must be done for therapeutic reasons or to protect the safety of students and staff. Under the new rules, too, schools only can use physical restraints “in severe crisis situations.”

Compared to their peers, students with disabilities are much more likely to be physically restrained or secluded by schools, according to a February 2019 report of the U.S. Government Accountability Office. For example, nationwide, more than 75 percent of the students physically restrained during the 2013-14 school year had a disability of some kind.