Disabled, and able to work

With new legislation and executive actions, states are doing more to improve the job prospects of people with disabilities

by Laura Tomaha (ltomaha@csg.org)

For nearly 40 years, South Dakota Rep. Fred Romkema has run a jobs training center for a segment of his state’s population that he says is too often forgotten. About 140 people with disabilities are currently served at the Northern Hills Training Center, and 108 of them are earning a regular paycheck. “With the right supervision and training and support, they can succeed in employment in the community,” Romkema says about his experience working with people with developmental disabilities. And that job success, he adds, is good not only for the individual, but the community — and the state — where he or she lives. “There is potential there that we are not tapping,” Romkema says of the state’s population with disabilities. “There is a cadre of potential employees who can certainly contribute in some of the jobs that are difficult to fill.”

New state strategies seek to change lives, and mindsets

Through a mix of legislation and actions taken by governors, new initiatives are being launched in states across the Midwest to remove workforce barriers and to help get more disabled individuals into the workforce. If successful, these initiatives could help close the large disparity in employment between the disabled and non-disabled. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for those with disabilities was 13.2 percent in 2013, almost double the rate for those without a disability (7.1 percent). People with disabilities are also disproportionally affected by poverty — nearly 30 percent live in poverty, compared to less than 14 percent of people without disabilities. “The employment challenge comes from the long-standing belief that people with disabilities have very limited abilities to work,” says Ryley Newport, a public policy associate with the Association of People with Disabilities. “People with disabilities [traditionally] have not been expected to work.” His association and other groups want to shift presumptions away from segregation, dependency and care and toward inclusion, employability and self-determination. And central to that strategy is changing policies at the state level, through an approach known as Employment First. Employment First is based on a presumption that people with disabilities can be employed, and that the jobs for them should be in integrated, community-based workplaces for competitive pay. This approach also makes employment the first and preferred service option for working-age people with disabilities who rely on publicly funded programs and supports. The goal of Employment First is to increase the quality of life for people with disabilities while also reducing reliance on traditional government supports. (Public support for unemployed workers with disabilities has been estimated to be $300 billion a year.) “What we are trying to do is change it so everyone has opportunities to work and to be part of the mainstream,” Newport says. According to Newport, Ohio is ahead of many other states in making this goal a reality. Gov. John Kasich launched his state’s Employment First policy, via executive order, in 2012. Legislation (HB 59) was then passed that same year. That original policy stated that “employment services for people with developmental disabilities shall be directed at community employment.” Additional legislation in 2013 clarified that community employment means competitive employment in an integrated setting, and that all people with developmental disabilities are to be presumed capable of community employment. Newport singles out two important provisions of Ohio’s current plan to employ more people with disabilities: First, it emphasizes the expectation of employability, and second, it identifies efforts to remove barriers to employment. Supporting Employment First, an advocacy group working for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the community and workplace, lists five state strategies to improve employment rates among the working-age disabled:

- Make disability employment part of the state’s workforce development strategy
- Find and support businesses in their efforts to employ people with disabilities.
- Increase the number of people with disabilities working in state government.
- Prepare youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential.
- Establish partnerships with the federal government and the private and nonprofit sectors.

**Midwest-Canada Relations**

**Disputed country-of-origin labeling policy slowing U.S. livestock imports from Canada**

Moving cattle and pigs from North Dakota to Saskatchewan or from Manitoba to Minnesota has always required a lot of paperwork, but until recently, that didn’t slow the movement of animals between Canada and the United States.

Because of the two countries’ highly integrated systems, animals have regularly traveled across the U.S.-Canada border for feeding and slaughter. But a U.S. policy enacted as part of some recent farm bills appears to be inhibiting this movement. Mandatory country-of-origin labeling, or COOL, requires meat from outside the United States to be labeled — and thus segregated during the production process. These rules began to take effect in 2009.

Between 2008 and 2013, exports of nondairy cattle from Canada to the United States for feeding or slaughter declined by one-third (see table). Over that same time period, Canadian hog exports declined by nearly half. Slaughterhouses and feeding facilities have been affected as well.

This fall, a World Trade Organization compliance panel ruled against the U.S. labeling regulations, saying they violated international trade obligations. The case against COOL was brought to the WTO by Canada and Mexico.

The current U.S. requirements force meatpackers to discriminate against foreign animals, the WTO panel found, and prevent Canadian and Mexican producers from selling their meat in the United States.

The United States could appeal the WTO ruling, and congressional changes to the labeling rules are also possible. But as it stands now, the United States could face WTO-approved trade sanctions from Canada and Mexico, with countervarying duties potentially impacting U.S. producers of meat, cheese, wine and other goods.

COOL was initiated as a way not only to promote American-grown products, but also to inform people about where their food comes from. "Regarding food safety, labeling is an important tool for consumers to evaluate the quality of the products they buy," South Dakota state Rep. Lance Russell says. Labeling opponents, though, say the livestock industry’s cross-border, integrated system has proven to be safe, and that commingling animals is less expensive for processors and consumers.

Under current federal rules, country-of-origin labeling must include information on each step of the production process — where the animal was born, where it was raised and where it was slaughtered. So the labeling for an animal that spent its entire time in the United States would now read "Born, Raised and Slaughtered in the U.S."

In an attempt to resolve the trade dispute between Canada, Mexico and the United States, and to also recognize the countries’ integrated livestock industries, some have proposed the use of a “produced in North America” brand.

**Passenger Rail**

**TIGER grants help keep trains running as federal funding for rail transportation wanes**

For states interested in partnering with the federal government on capital improvements to passenger rail, the current options are severely limited.

Since fiscal year 2011, the main federal grant program — the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program — has not been funded by the U.S. Congress. That leaves only one funding source, a U.S. grant program known as TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery), which funds an array of transportation-related projects thought to have a significant impact on the nation, a region or a metropolitan area.

In the most recent round of TIGER funding, only one passenger-rail improvement project successfully secured a grant — $12.5 million to upgrade parts of Amtrak’s Southwest Chief route in Kansas and Colorado. Matching funds of $9.3 million will come from a mix of state, local and private sources.

According to Kansas Department of Transportation officials, the money will be used to replace the worst track on a 150-mile stretch between Hutchinson, Kan., and southeastern Colorado.

Without the grant, passenger rail service for three communities in rural Kansas — Hutchinson, Dodge City and Garden — and in parts of Colorado and New Mexico would have been lost. (Without the upgrades, Amtrak had indicated it would reroute the Southwest Chief when its current contract with BNSF Railway expires in 2015.)

The Southwest Chief is one of the few public transportation options for much of central Kansas and eastern Colorado, and public support in these communities and states for continuing the service has been high. The TIGER grant and matching funds will allow trains to continue running at sufficient speeds for passenger rail operation and will give all parties more time to seek funding for additional improvements needed along the line.

During the first five rounds of TIGER, rail (both freight and passenger) received almost a quarter of all funding awarded (see chart). In the most recent round, announced in September, rail projects received a smaller overall share (11 percent).

In all, the U.S. Congress has appropriated $4.1 billion for six rounds of TIGER grants between FY 2009 and 2014. In the Midwest, funded projects related to passenger rail have included:

- **FY 2010** — improvements to the Amtrak station in the Indiana town of Waterloo and creation of a new multimodal station in Moline, Ill;
- **FY 2011** — preventing flooding along a section of track in North Dakota between Devils Lake and Churchs Ferry; and
- **FY 2013** — completion of improvements to the Dearborn-Kalamazoo section of the Detroit-Chicago corridor and construction of a rail underpass that will benefit the Chicago-St. Louis corridor.

In addition, a project known as CREATE (Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program) has received $110.4 million in TIGER funding. One primary goal of CREATE is to reduce congestion on Amtrak routes serving the Midwest.

**U.S. imports of Canadian cattle and hogs, 2008-13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livestock type</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeder cattle</td>
<td>641,000</td>
<td>358,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaughter steers/hogs</td>
<td>661,000</td>
<td>354,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaughter cows</td>
<td>187,000</td>
<td>278,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slaughter bulls</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeder hogs</td>
<td>7.04 million</td>
<td>4.16 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaughter hogs</td>
<td>2.11 million</td>
<td>796,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cattle</td>
<td>1.54 million</td>
<td>1.03 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hogs</td>
<td>8.34 million</td>
<td>4.96 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**TIGER grant outlays, FY 2009-13 (# of grants per category)**

- **Planning** — $27.56 million (33 grants)
- **Rail** — $308.56 million (48 grants)
- **Port** — $490.12 million (31 grants)
- **Bicycle & Pedestrian** — $113.67 million (12 grants)

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation

**Materials Transportation Committee.**

**Brief written by Laura Kliewer, director of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, which was formed by an interstate compact and now includes nine member states. She can be reached at kliewer@miprc.org. The committee’s co-chairs are Kansas House Speaker Ray Merrick and Saskatchewan MLA Wayne Elhard.**
California law on housing of hens has big implications for egg exporters in the Midwest

As voters in California dictate how Midwestern farmers house their hens, if the farmers want to sell eggs to California, the answer could be “yes” — unless an appeal filed by Iowa, Nebraska and four other states is successful.

Beginning Jan. 1, egg farmers in California must comply with Proposition 2: a new law, approved by voters in 2008, under which hens must be able to stand up, turn around and spread their wings without touching their cage or another bird.

The ballot initiative came in response to criticism of conventional cages. According to groups such as the Humane Society of the United States, which organized the effort to put the measure on the ballot, the cages are cruel. Critics also say the stress and confinement make hens more susceptible to diseases, including salmonella.

California rules require roughly 124 square inches per bird. (About 95 percent of eggs in the United States are produced in cages providing about 70 square inches per bird.) Similarly, in 2009, Michigan passed a requirement that hens have 144 square inches, and Ohio agreed not to issue permits for new farms using conventional cages.

To comply with the new law, farmers can build new facilities or significantly reduce hen numbers and remove partitions between cages.

Studies by the University of California concluded that such changes would raise the cost of production by at least 20 percent.

Some California legislators worried that the measure would put the state’s egg farmers at an economic disadvantage. The result was AB 1437, which requires out-of-state egg farmers wishing to sell their products in California to comply with the new caging standards, too.

The economic impact of shipping eggs into California is significant for Midwestern states. California residents consume the eggs of 20 million chickens each day, and the state must import to meet that demand. Iowa, Minnesota and Ohio supply most of these eggs. The total value of Midwestern eggs shipped to California is estimated at more than $150 million yearly.

But it will cost producers an estimated $24 per bird to meet the California standards, according to Dermot Hayes, a professor of agriculture economics at Iowa State University. He estimates that 40 percent of Iowa laying hens will be killed to meet the new space requirements.

Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Alabama, Oklahoma and Kentucky have challenged the California law as a violation of the U.S. Constitution’s Commerce Clause.

Katie Spohn, Nebraska’s deputy attorney general, argues that states cannot require eggs being shipped across state lines to meet standards (quality, condition, weight, quantity or grade) that go beyond federal requirements.

Others question whether the new law is markedly better for the animals. According to Ken Klippen of Egg Farmers of America, there is no evidence that larger cage sizes have any impact on either egg safety or hen welfare.

In October, a federal judge dismissed the states’ lawsuit, ruling that they lacked legal standing because they were representing only the economic interests of egg farmers rather than “a substantial segment of their populations.” The six states have filed an appeal.

Iowa’s assistant attorney general, Jacob Larson, says the case has implications beyond the egg industry. If California’s law stands, states could ban pork from facilities that use gestation crates, veal from calves raised in individual pens, or milk from confinement dairies.

### Midwestern states’ egg shipments to California (July 2012–June 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total cases*</th>
<th>% of state production</th>
<th>% of total CA imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>393,000</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>333,000</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>3.64 million</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>165,000</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>1.70 million</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>1.10 million</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>177,000</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes shell, liquid and dry eggs. Source: California Department of Agriculture

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Health & Human Services

Ebola scare sparks discussion on quarantine, other policies to keep infectious diseases in check

As the Ebola virus continues to affect tens of thousands of people halfway across the world in Africa, it is also spurring policy discussions in the United States about how governments can and should control the spread of serious infectious diseases.

The controversy has been fueled by the story of an American nurse who returned in October from an aid mission to Sierra Leone. When she arrived at Newark Airport, her outrage over New Jersey’s strict quarantine laws — and subsequent refusal to comply with her home state of Maine’s rules — set off a nationwide debate.

And it has caused citizens and policymakers alike to ask: When a dangerous disease is identified, who has the power to isolate and quarantine citizens? The answer is complex, but states have broad powers to do so, including legal authority in matters of quarantine, “but laws also allow officials to handle most suspected cases of disease and others transferring that power to local officials.

On the national level, the federal government has the authority to take steps to prevent communicable diseases from entering the country — and spreading between states. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention routinely monitor people arriving at land borders and by ship, looking for symptoms of such diseases. The CDC can legally detain and examine people at borders or traveling between states.

However, this authority can be used only for diseases for which it is specifically approved by presidential executive order. The current list includes nine diseases, including viral hemorrhagic fevers (such as Ebola), cholera and smallpox. The last major federal quarantine was during the influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919.

But within states, the responsibility to protect the public from infectious disease lies with state policy-makers and health officials. State laws vary regarding isolation and quarantine, with some authorizing officials to handle most suspected cases of disease and others transferring that power to local officials.

In Illinois, for example, the state has “supreme authority in matters of quarantine,” but laws also allow local officials to take action to keep disease from spreading. However, in Kansas, Ohio and South Dakota, local officials have primary responsibility for supervising

State laws seek to balance individual rights with the need to protect the general public

Potential outbreaks; state agencies can step in if local governments are deemed to neglect their duty.

Indiana gives more power to its department of health, which can enforce its rules in local jurisdictions during emergencies. But in Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin, either the state public health department or local officials can impose quarantine and isolation. Iowa’s law states that quarantine “shall rarely be imposed.”

Other related powers are granted to officials throughout the Midwest. In Kansas and Michigan, for example, local health officers can prohibit public gatherings in order to prevent the spread of a disease.

Minnesota law allows the state health commissioner to inspect modes of transportation crossing state borders. Agents can isolate or quarantine passengers, with their luggage, as long as deemed necessary. (South Dakota law includes a similar provision.) Minnesota physicians, too, must report to the state the name of anyone who refuses to comply with isolation procedures. The state can seek an injunction if the person is a risk to public health.

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Agriculture & Natural Resources

Brief written by Carolyn Orr, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee. She can be reached at kor@agdaily.com. The committee’s co-chairs are Indiana Rep. Bill Friend and Minnesota Rep. Rick Hansen.

Brief written by Kate Tormey, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Health and Human Services Committee. She can be reached at ktormey@csg.org. The committee’s co-chairs are Iowa Rep. Joel Fry and Minnesota Sen. Kathy Sheran.
AROUND THE REGION

Year in Review: A look at some of the policy trends, and ‘firsts,’ in Midwest’s legislatures

Compared to years of the not-so-distant past, 2014 was a relatively quiet one in capitols across the Midwest.

The fiscal storm that hit legislatures five years ago has now passed, and no single issue dominated headlines — unlike in 2011 and 2012, when debate over state laws on public and private unions captured international attention.

Yet a lot got done in 2014. There were also several policy areas that got the attention of multiple Midwestern legislatures this year — including tax cuts, raises in the minimum wage, new medical-marijuana laws, restrictions on the use of drones, and state mandates related to autism coverage.

Taxes cut in several states

Thanks in part to more-stable fiscal conditions, several state legislatures in the Midwest approved tax-cut proposals in 2014.

Indiana lawmakers approved a tax-relief package for businesses that includes a reduction in the corporate income tax over the next six years (from 6.5 percent to 4.9 percent). In Wisconsin, the income tax rate imposed on low-income earners was cut, while in Nebraska, the Legislature voted to index the state’s personal income-tax brackets to the rate of inflation, reduce property taxes, and provide tax exemptions to individuals’ Social Security and veterans’ benefits.

Other changes this year included Michigan’s phaseout of a personal property tax and a $432 million tax package in Minnesota that targeted help for middle-class earners and repealed some business-to-business taxes.

Minimum-wage hikes approved

Through a mix of legislative actions and voter-initiated ballot proposals, a majority of Midwestern states now have a minimum wage higher than the federally required rate of $7.25 per hour.

Minnesota is scheduled to have the highest minimum wage in the region: $9.50 per hour by 2016 for individuals employed by the state’s larger employers. The minimum wages in Michigan, Nebraska and South Dakota will also soon rise; Illinois and Ohio had already set wages higher than the federal requirement.

Medical-marijuana bills advance

The legal use of medical marijuana spread to more states in the Midwest in 2014. In Minnesota, passage of SF 2470 will allow the use of cannabis by individuals who have certain qualifying medical conditions. The medical cannabis will be provided by two in-state, licensed manufacturers and be delivered to patients in a non-smokable form (pill or liquid, for example).

Under a bill signed into law in Iowa this year (SF 2360), individuals, both children and adults, who suffer from epilepsy will have the chance to legally access cannabidiol oil.

Illinois, meanwhile, expanded its existing medical-marijuana law this year with passage of SB 2636. The new law permits individuals under the age of 18 who suffer from seizures to be treated with non-smokable forms of cannabis. Michigan is the other Midwestern state that allows for the legal use of medical marijuana.

States restrict use of drones

Four states in the Midwest passed laws in 2014 restricting the use of drones.

Wisconsin’s SB 196 prohibits the warrantless use of drones by law enforcement (with exceptions for certain emergency situations) in a “place or location where an individual has a reasonable expectation of privacy.” Wisconsin lawmakers also made it a Class A misdemeanor for individuals to use a drone to photograph or observe others in non-public places.

Laws in Indiana (HB 1009) and Iowa (HF 2289) now require police to obtain warrants before using drones. In Illinois, SB 2937 puts new restrictions on how police obtain and use information that comes from the drone of a private third party. That follows up on 2013 legislation (SB 1587) that requires police to obtain a warrant before using drones.

More states require autism coverage

Laws that require insurers to cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism spread to two more Midwestern states in 2014.

Nebraska’s new mandate (LB 254) covers individuals up to the age of 21 and encompasses a wide range of services, including up to 25 hours per week for behavioral health treatments such as applied behavior analysis. Kansas’ HB 2744 also includes applied behavior analysis among the covered services; it requires coverage for children up to the age of 12.

According to the advocacy organization Autism Speaks, six other Midwestern states already had insurance mandates in place: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Capital Closeup: Review of Year in Midwest’s Legislatures

Some ‘firsts’ from the Midwest’s state legislatures in 2014

- Illinois — First state to ban use of plastic microbeads in products in order to prevent Great Lakes pollution (SB 2727)
- Indiana — First state to opt out of Common Core education standards (SB 91)
- Michigan — First state in Midwest to give terminally ill patients right to try experimental medication (SB 1991 and HB 5649)
- Minnesota — First state to require new smartphones to be equipped with an anti-theft “kill switch” (SF 1740)
- Ohio — First state to freeze previously enacted energy-efficiency standards; proponents of SB 310 say change was needed because the standards were “simply not achievable or sustainable”
- Wisconsin — First state to require independent investigations of “officer-involved deaths”: the death of an individual that results directly from an action or an omission of a law enforcement officer (AB 409)

Changes in minimum-wage laws*

Changes in laws regarding use of medical marijuana/cannabis

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Changes in laws regarding use of medical marijuana/cannabis
Land-grant universities changed the face of higher education, and 3 Midwestern states can claim historic ‘firsts’ in their development

by Mike McCabe (mmccabe@csg.org)

T

hink of the American Midwest, and you may think first of natural resources. A land of Great Lakes and Great Plains, the region is world-renowned for its sparkling waters and its fertile soil. But the region’s strength depends on much more than natural abundance.

Part industrial heartland, part agricultural breadbasket, the Midwest is also home to an extensive network of world-class academic institutions, many of which trace their roots to a 19th-century movement to make higher education more practical and more readily available to rural and working-class citizens.

In time, that movement would change the face of higher education in America, with several Midwestern states playing key roles as pioneers in the establishment of new colleges that offered courses in agriculture and the mechanic arts, as well as other scientific and classical studies.

The cornerstone for this effort was laid during the Civil War, when the U.S. Congress approved the Morrill Act, which donated public lands to the states for their use in establishing new colleges. The act was passed in 1862, following the passage of the Morrill Act, Iowa became the first state to formally accept the bill’s provisions.

But before designating the State Agricultural College in Ames (later Iowa State University) as Iowa’s land-grant college in 1864, another Midwestern state, Kansas, established what some consider to be the first land-grant institution created under the Morrill Act. That happened in February 1863, when the state Legislature transferred the assets of financially strapped Bluemont College to the state. This new land-grant school later became Kansas State University.

But the region’s strongest claim to land-grant primacy arguably belongs to Michigan, where the nation’s first agricultural college was chartered under state law in 1855, seven years before the Morrill Act was passed.

Like the schools that were later established under the federal act, the Agricultural College of Michigan, which later became Michigan State University, was initially funded through a land grant from the state. The Michigan model served as a prototype for the land-grant idea that was later built into the Morrill Act.

More economic growth, opportunity

For decades, many of the new land-grant schools struggled. Meager profits from the sales of granted lands meant that endowments were often insufficient to sustain growth, and few of the new colleges had access to the resources they needed.

All of that began to change with federal passage of the Hatch Act in 1887. It provided states with funds for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations under the direction of their land-grant colleges. Then, in 1890, Congress approved the Second Morrill Act, which provided additional support to land-grant institutions in the form of cash instead of land.

Another milestone came in 1914 with passage of the Smith-Lever Act, which effectively extended the land-grant outreach mission by establishing the cooperative extension service to help disseminate research and technology to end users in rural areas.

Each of these measures helped to transform the initial patchwork of small agricultural colleges into a dynamic network of educational institutions.

“Land-grant institutions provided opportunities for millions of middle-class Americans to achieve a postsecondary education, which was vital to the nation’s economic growth,” notes Larry Isak, president of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, adding that it was a nationwide effort in higher education “on a scale never before attempted anywhere.”

Today, more than 100 colleges and universities across the country, including 3 in the Midwest, enjoy land-grant status.

Together, they conduct cutting-edge research into fields ranging from physics and agricultural science to medicine, engineering and more. Approximately 85 percent of all bachelor’s degrees and 70 percent of all graduate degrees earned in the United States come from land-grant institutions. And their history of open admissions policies has made it possible for unprecedented numbers of women, rural students and working-class citizens to obtain affordable educations.

Previous articles from CSG Midwest’s First in the Midwest series are available at www.csgmidwest.org.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION: What guidelines and regulations exist regarding human donor milk for infants whose mothers cannot provide breast milk?

Breast milk contains important nutrients, immune-system antibodies and growth factors that all contribute to a baby’s health, particularly babies who are vulnerable because they are premature or underweight. But a number of circumstances — including maternal illness, death, surgery, use of drugs or medications, and certain chronic conditions — can prevent a mother from being able to breastfeed.

One potential alternative for some babies, then, is the use of human donor milk.

Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Ohio are among the states with nonprofit human-milk banks that have been certified by the Human Milk Banking Association of North America. (The association’s certification standards were established with input from the federal government and the blood and tissue industries.)

In four states (California, New York, Maryland and Texas), laws have been passed defining and/or regulating human milk banks. New York, for example, requires that donors be periodically screened and regulated collection and storage at milk banks. In Maryland, milk banks must acquire permits and meet certain inspection and testing standards.

According to the U.S. Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services, some states provide Medicaid coverage for infants to use donor milk. For example, in Texas, Medicaid covers the cost for donor milk for a limited period of time, when its use is deemed medically necessary. And a new policy in the District of Columbia includes coverage for Medicaid-eligible infants through age 11 months, when certain “medically necessary” conditions are met.

According to the National Association of Neonatal Nurses, pasteurized human donor milk costs about $4.50 an ounce, but for every dollar spent on banked donor milk, a state can save up to $11 in medical costs.

But apart from requiring coverage for the cost of a breast pump, there are few federal guidelines on what qualifies as “support, supplies and counseling” — or who may provide or be paid for lactation care. To help fill that gap, the National Breastfeeding Association and the U.S. Breastfeeding Committee have developed a model policy on insurance coverage for breastfeeding. That proposed policy includes as a covered benefit pasteurized milk from a human donor — provided that the donor has been screened and that the milk comes from a certified milk bank. A prescription from a licensed provider would also be required and have to be renewed every three months.
Ohio considered among nation’s leaders in helping people with disabilities find work

In support of the state’s Employment First strategy, the Ohio General Assembly has appropriated $3 million a year in the current budget. Lawmakers have also done more to ensure the state’s young people are being prepared for work after school. For example, the individualized education plan, or IEP for special-education students age 14 and older must now include a post-secondary goal of community-based employment.

Plains in Illinois, Michigan seek to maximize job opportunities

Through considered a model state, Ohio is far from alone in focusing more on the employment needs of individuals with disabilities.

Illinois lawmakers passed the Employment First Act (HB 2591) in July 2013, and the state is now in the early stages of setting new policies and goals around it. The act, in part, requires state agencies to work together to make competitive employment for people with disabilities a priority.

"[I]t will go a long way toward aligning state policy with Illinois’ values of inclusion and fair play for people with disabilities," says Illinois Sen. Daniel Biss, the primary Senate sponsor of the bill.

Under the legislation, an Illinois task force will collect data from all state agencies and monitor how well state services are meeting the goal of community-based employment for people with disabilities.

"There’s so much loose talk around the goal of [integrated employment], but we’re at a loss of how to do something about it," Biss says. "The Employment First Act is a necessary part of making sure our laws maximize the opportunities people with disabilities have to live with dignity.

In Iowa, no formal Employment First laws have been passed and no policy directives are in place. However, it is currently a "protégé state" under a U.S. Department of Labor initiative designed to help states learn from one another on how to prioritize integrated employment.

Iowa has been matched with the state of Washington — designated as a “mentor state” because it already has effective policies and funding mechanisms in place. The program gives Iowa officials the chance to study, and possibly adopt, Washington’s Employment First strategies.

Michigan calls its new strategic plan for improving employment outcomes for the disabled “Better Off Working.” Released this year, it is the result of a collaboration among heads of state agencies, business leaders and advocates for the disabled.

The strategy mirrors some of the goals of Employment First. For example, de-emphasize disability as a de facto public assistance program, and instead refocus state services and programs on the goal of employment.

“Whatever the goals and aspirations and the hopes of people with development differences, it is our job to help them achieve those goals and not predetermine what their outcome is going to be,” says Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, the father of a child with autism and one of many people who helped shape the plan.

He adds that this change cannot occur without changes in policy alone; it also requires a shift in attitudes. And it also entails input, cooperation and buy-in from the business community.

To that end, the state this year began recognizing exemplary employers with Better Off Working Awards. Meijer, the Grand Rapids-based grocery and supermarket chain, was one of two businesses to receive the inaugural award.
They made the decision to employ people who have been largely locked out of employment opportunities in the past," Calley says of the two award winners.

In turn, Meijer executives credit the state of Michigan, led by Gov. Rick Snyder, with raising awareness about the issue.

"(Gov. Snyder) really challenged businesses to come together with government and community organizations to say, 'How can we create an environment for businesses to really engage in this work?'" says Rick Keyes, Meijer's executive vice president of supply chain and manufacturing.

Meijer has a long history of hiring people with disabilities in its stores. However, Keyes says, the company has redoubled its efforts in recent years, in part spurred by the governor's focus on the issue.

At one of Meijer's production and manufacturing facilities in Lansing, for example, more than 30 percent of the employees are individuals with disabilities. The company worked with a community partner to help hire and train these workers, and also to provide the necessary accommodations and support.

"We used that success as a springboard for our other operations," Keyes says, adding that increased hiring of individuals with disabilities "has had an amazing impact on our culture and on our team."

Businesses such as Meijer wanting to hire individuals with disabilities may still need assistance from the state — for example, access to expertise and resources related to vocational rehabilitation.

In turn, states need input from business leaders to make Employment First strategies succeed.

"The more you can speak with employers who have had a successful experience," Newport says, "that is what will change the public's perspective on what people with disabilities can do."

And Newport also says policymakers need to understand the perspective of the disabled workers themselves.

"Learn what it's like for people with disabilities to work and know what it looks like to work in the community," he says.

**In South Dakota, Employment Works Initiative helps guide policymakers**

South Dakota is led by a governor who witnessed first-hand the challenges faced by people with disabilities, including job-related struggles. Raised by deaf parents on a farm in southeastern South Dakota, Dennis Daugaard has now taken on a very public role in advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In 2013, he launched the state's Employment Works Initiative.

"This is one of the most promising new efforts that I have seen over the years," says Rep. Romkema, who served on a 35-member task force that was established as part of Employment Works and that has since released a series of recommendations for state action.

Those recommendations focus on ways the state can better connect businesses with the disabled population, provide more support for employers and employees, and promote awareness about the abilities and capabilities of many disabled people.

South Dakota has since established a single point of contact, a business liaison, within the Department of Human Services to work with businesses on hiring people with disabilities.

Another task force recommendation was to eliminate disincentives for people with disabilities to find employment. Romkema views that policy area as being particularly important. Are there state or federal benefits that, in one way or another, discourage people from finding work?

South Dakota lawmakers found one in their own state and recently did away with it.

"If you earned more than $4080, your benefits were reduced," Romkema says, explaining a cost-share requirement in one of the state's Medicaid waiver programs. "People realized there was no incentive to work."

**Leading by example: Hiring more disabled people in state government**

Another way for a state to boost employment among disabled workers is to do the hiring itself.

In Minnesota and Michigan, for example, the governors have recently issued executive orders to improve their state governments’ hiring of individuals with disabilities.

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton has directed state agencies to increase the employment of people with disabilities to 7 percent by 2018. Last year, 3.2 percent of the state’s government workforce was disabled. Dayton has expressed concern that the proportion of disabled people working for the state has dropped in recent years and that Minnesota has fallen behind the rest of the nation.

In Michigan, Lt. Gov. Calley now expects state agencies to set hiring goals and to establish aggressive new recruitment and retention plans that bring more people with disabilities into the state workforce.

"I'd like our state to be a magnet for this talent that is out there — that untapped potential," Calley says. "And then I intend to show how good the performance is when you make these types of opportunities available."

"This needs to be fully integrated, competitive employment," he adds, "where somebody comes in with the same type of benefits and pay that anyone else would."

Boosting employment for the disabled, Calley says, is part of an even greater objective that all states can play a part in achieving.

"So far I haven't seen any government anywhere in our nation that has made enough progress yet in this constant fight against stigma," Calley says. "This is an area where we all have a lot of learning to do."

Because of his own family's experience with autism, Calley has seen a growing awareness, understanding and inclusiveness of people with autism, as well as a greater willingness for individuals and families living with this diagnosis to be more open and public.

"I want that for everyone else," he says. "I want people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder or depression or other types of developmental disabilities to have that same type of freedom."
STATELINE PROFILE

Illinois Sen. John Cullerton

Longtime legislator became Senate president in 2009, and has been in middle of effort to improve state’s pension, fiscal outlook

by Kate Tormey (ktormey@csj.org)

I llinois Sen. John Cullerton says that his decision to run for public office was a bit of “a lark.” He even jokes that his first win was due in part to a good ballot position.

But genetics could have been at play, too. Cullerton comes from a long line of public officials who have served in various levels of government dating back to the 1870s. Despite growing up in an extended family that was active in Illinois politics, Cullerton didn’t originally think he’d follow that path. But after law school, Cullerton began practicing as an assistant state’s attorney, got involved in the state Democratic Party, and soon realized that he not only had the family history for the job, but the passion for it, too.

More than three decades later, as president of the Illinois Senate, Cullerton is now helping lead his home state through an especially challenging period in its political history.

When he and his legislative colleagues return to Springfield, they will once again face some difficult questions. How can we shore up our state’s financially troubled public pension system? How will we balance the state’s budget, especially with a temporary income-tax hike set to expire? (With no legislative change, Illinois’ flat income-tax rate will fall from 5 percent to 3.75 percent in 2015.)

“That’s going to be the big question next year. How do we get enough revenue to pay for our budget?” Cullerton says.

And those questions will have to be answered under a new political power structure in Illinois. Cullerton and fellow Democrats still control the House and Senate by comfortable margins, but after 12 years, one-party rule is over in Illinois. The state’s new governor, Bruce Rauner, is a Republican.

Transition to legislative leadership

But this shared-power dynamic is not new to Cullerton. He has worked with Republican governors in the past, for example, and has also served in the minority.

Cullerton first joined the Illinois General Assembly in 1979 as a member of the House, and was soon called to action on a topic that hit close to home.

After getting married the same year he was sworn in, Cullerton and his wife had three children in a span of 2 1/2 years. And the new father soon found himself working with a nonprofit car-seat loan program.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Senate President Cullerton talked about legislative leadership and the future of his state’s pension system. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

Q: Illinois’ pension system has made national news because of the huge funding shortfall that it faces (an estimated $100 billion). Why is the system and situation in Illinois unique compared to other states?

A: First, we have a specific Pension Clause in our state Constitution, and it was put in there specifically to make it impossible for us to take away people’s pension benefits once they’re accrued. That really ties your hands.

The second thing about Illinois is that not only do we take care of state employees, we take care of all the university employees, all of the community-college employees and 80 percent of the teachers in the state. So because of that, we have more active retirees than any other state in the nation.

Our pension systems are strong, but we’re paying a lot of money, and that’s the objection folks have. They would like not to have to pay so much of our general revenue fund into pensions; it’s about 17 percent of our total budget.

Q: In 2013, state lawmakers passed a long-debated bill to reform the state pension system. Do you think it was a good compromise?

A: The law reduces people’s pension benefits, and I think it’s very likely to be found unconstitutional. I didn’t want to pass it … but the only way to find out if it was unconstitutional was to have a test case, so that’s what we’re doing.

That’s in the Supreme Court right now and we’ll see, but if [the justices] were to find it unconstitutional, we have a backup [bill] that is constitutional. It doesn’t save as much money but … we are willing to do that if and when the court rules.

Q: Some have called specifically for a change to the current system in which Chicago’s public-school teachers’ pensions are paid for by the city. What is your stance on that issue?

A: Clearly it makes no sense, and no one can justify a situation where the state of Illinois is employer for the suburban and downtown school districts but not for Chicago.

So there are two ways of looking at that: either we have the suburban and downtown school districts start paying for pensions themselves, or have the state be the employer for Chicago teachers [and pick up the cost of pensions]. One of those two things would have to happen for it to be fair.

The city of Chicago has four pension systems (for fire, police, municipal employees and laborers), and those are really in trouble, worse so than the state. So we have to assist the city of Chicago, maybe not necessarily with money, although that’s one way of doing it.

We could maybe just allow them to spread out the payments and figure out a constitutional way to perhaps reduce some people’s benefits to make sure that the whole system stays solvent.
What I wish I’d known then ...

It is important for us all to think back to our early days and know that we now are the “old-timers” and have a responsibility to the newest members of the legislature.

Kansas lawmaker looks back on her first year in office, and offers tips to help newcomers survive the hectic months ahead

by Kansas Sen. Elaine Bowers (Elaine.Bowers@senate.ks.gov)

E
ev though it seems like eons ago, it was only in the fall of 2006 that I was preparing to become a new Kansas state representative.

As I think about it now, it was a daunting prospect — the idea of getting ready for a job without truly understanding the full scope of the position.

Regardless of this fact, I was entirely willing to throw myself into it with gusto.

Although this was my first time in elected office, I felt totally comfortable representing the area where I grew up, raised my own family and operated a small business with my husband — I knew who I was and from where I came. I also knew I didn’t know everything, especially about the legislative branch, and I wasn’t going to assume anything in advance.

Looking back, there are many things on my list of “I wish had known” items. I share that list in this article, with the hope that it, in some small way, can help our new state legislators in the Midwest as they prepare for their first year in the job.

Take care of yourself

First, I wish I had known as a newcomer about the crazy schedule that legislators are forced to keep.

The legislative day begins before 8 a.m. and doesn’t end at 5 p.m.; it runs long into the evenings with receptions and dinners. It is mentally and, surprisingly, physically draining.

I learned the hard way to drink more water and take my vitamins. The little exercise I get is taking the stairs in the Statehouse while wearing a pedometer as encouragement. (I know now that walking is quicker than waiting for an elevator anyway!)

Perhaps there is no way to prepare a person for this unique job, but one of the most important things I know now is to stay healthy and try to eat properly.

The legislative procedure and daily process is fascinating, and I have learned a lot by observing.

I was lucky to be assigned seat No. 85, near the back of the chamber in the Kansas House, where I could watch the interaction of the more experienced legislators as they carried and debated bills during my first few months.

I also witnessed alliances being formed between the members and saw firsthand how members truly “work across the aisle.”

I quickly learned, too, the importance of understanding the rules of the legislature. This knowledge allows a lawmaker to control the legislative process — for example, sometimes ending debate as quickly as it started, in committee or on the floor, simply by knowing the rules.

Find a way to stay organized

As much time as it took at the start to understand the rules and process, however, another challenge was even greater — finding a way to stay organized and on task.

I thought a simple daily calendar notebook would work, but it has taken me eight years to finally find a system in Topeka and at home to keep me on track.

I think allowing myself to be flexible has helped a great deal.

As we are all unique in our states, it could be an ongoing experiment to find what works best for each individual. A three-ring binder for the invitations, plus my daily schedule printed out during session, works for me. However, I am still open to change if I find a better way. It is safe to say that I am still evolving in my organizational abilities.

Ask for help, then thank the helpers

As a new legislator, I was looking forward to working with others in Topeka to solve problems.

I was surprised about the large, broad range of questions and requests for information from home.

I learned a long time ago not to be too proud to ask for help. So not knowing “how” to answer, I quickly learned the “who.”

I simply needed to find the right person in the right agency to help my constituents. I’ve learned to ask for a timely deadline and to be copied on all responses after I find the right helper. I still keep a magic list of fix-it people, which itself is constantly changing.

I take every opportunity to share my list of experts with my colleagues, as I believe we all do better when we help each other become more successful. If I have the knowledge and skills to help someone, then I do — regardless of party or chamber.

I also like to see to it that the people behind the scenes (researchers, revisers and agency support staff) are given the proper credit. A well-deserved thank you can go a long way. I have found, too, especially at the end of session when the days are long, that cookies and mini-cupcakes are a favorite.

Listen twice as much as you talk

I am sure both novice and experienced legislators will remember the people who helped them from the beginning.

The best tip I ever received was from the man who urged me to run for office: “Always remember that you have two ears and one mouth.” In other words, listen twice as much as you talk. Simple but true.

There are many people who have been my own mentors — former Speaker Melvin Neufeld, whom I still bounce things off of today (I have his “top 10 rules” on my desk); the late Kansas Senate President Ross Doyen, who believed in me as a legislator before I did; and the late Rep. Bob Bethel, who was a lay minister and who died in a car wreck driving home from session in 2012.

I owe a lot to the legislators who took the time to make sure I was understanding and growing — it has helped make me the legislator I am today.

I think it is important for us all to think back to our early days and know that we now are the “old-timers” and have a responsibility to the newest members of the legislature.

It is our turn to offer advice and encouragement, and to coax the best out of a newer member — and ourselves for that matter.

The best way to start out the new session on a positive note is to lead by example and show true respect for one another regardless of geography or philosophy. And finally, a bit of fun advice from a co-mate who is no longer with me in Topeka: “Sit up straight and don’t chew on your pencil — you never know when you might be on TV!”
A four-member leadership team of state lawmakers will guide the work of the Midwestern Legislative Conference over the next year.

The MLC is a nonprofit, professional association of legislators from the 11-state Midwest. All 1,150 state lawmakers from the region are members of the MLC and encouraged to make the most of its various activities and services. Provincial legislators from Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan also take part in the MLC as affiliate members.

Leading the group over the next year will be North Dakota Sen. Tim Flakoll, who has been a member of his state’s Legislature since 1999 and, for the past two years, served as Senate president pro tempore. The other MLC officers in 2015 will be Wisconsin Rep. Joan Ballweg, Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen and Nebraska Sen. Beau McCoy. Under the current leadership rotation, Ballweg and Petersen are in line to serve as MLC chair in 2016 and 2017, respectively. McCoy led the group in 2014.

In addition to these four officers, the MLC is governed by a bipartisan Executive Committee made up of legislators from each of the Midwest’s 11 states. The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staff support to the MLC.

MLC events, services for legislators

The purpose of this nonpartisan association is to foster cooperation among the region’s policymakers through the exchange of information and ideas, the sharing of knowledge, and the pursuit of collaborative efforts to improve state government. Its products and services include the following:

- **The MLC Annual Meeting** — This annual event brings hundreds of legislators to a different Midwestern city and state every year. In 2015, the MLC will hold its 70th Annual Meeting on July 12-15 in Bismarck, N.D. (See story on page 11 for some of the speakers already scheduled to be at the event.)

- **Professional development training** — The Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, or BILLD, offers five days of intensive training to Midwestern legislators in their first four years of service. BILLD has trained hundreds of legislators, many of whom have since moved on to serve in key legislative leadership positions in their states or have been elected to the U.S. Congress.

Applications to become a 2015 BILLD Fellow are available at www.csgmidwest.org. The program is held on the campus of the University of Wisconsin; it will run from Aug. 21-25.

- **Policy training** — The MLC’s Under the Dome initiative brings training on key policy issues to the Midwest’s state capitols. The MLC also provides professional development workshops through Under the Dome. (See story to the right for more information.)

- **Research assistance** — CSG Midwest provides tailored research assistance to the region’s legislators and legislative staff through its Information Helpline (csgm@csg.org or 630.925.1922). In addition, all of the policy research done on behalf of the MLC is available at www.csgmidwest.org and knowledgecenter.csg.org.

- **StateLine MidWest** — This monthly publication aims to capture noteworthy policy trends and innovations occurring in the Midwest’s state capitols.

- **MLC policy committees** — The MLC has interstate legislative committees on agriculture, economic development, education, health care and Midwest-Canada relations. These committees provide a forum for legislators to learn from and work with one another, explore issues of regional importance, and provide a voice for the region (through the passage of resolutions sent to members of the U.S. Congress or the president, for example).

Anyone interested in getting involved in these committees or other MLC-related activities can contact the CSG Midwest office at 630.925.1922 or csgm@csg.org.

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**About the Midwestern Legislative Conference**

- nonpartisan professional association of all legislators from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin
- has four affiliate member provinces: Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan
- receives staff support from the Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments

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**CSG Midwest brings customized training to capitols**

CSG Midwest’s commitment to providing customized training to state legislators inside their capitols will continue in 2015, starting with a Jan. 21 workshop in Madison, Wis.

This first Under the Dome program of the new year will examine health and wellness under the U.S. Affordable Care Act, as well as the implications for state policy.

The Council of State Governments is sponsoring the workshop in conjunction with the Wisconsin Legislative Council. Geared for legislators and legislative staff, the event will feature a presentation from Gallup on the “Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index.”

Under the Dome began two years ago under the leadership of the Midwestern Legislative Conference. (CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.)

This past year, CSG Midwest brought customized training to the states of Nebraska and Illinois.

In Nebraska, state leaders explored the importance of entrepreneurship to economic growth as well as policy strategies to promote it. The Under the Dome workshop in Illinois examined Great Lakes and water policy, including water management and new ideas to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species. This event was presented in conjunction with the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, a bipartisan group of state legislators that receives staff support from CSG Midwest.

Since it began, Under the Dome has delivered a range of programming on professional development and public policy. CSG Midwest is seeking input from the region’s state legislators for future workshops. Please contact Mike McCabe at 630.925.1922 or mmccabe@csg.org.

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Under the Dome training held in Midwest’s state capitols

- **State entrepreneurial policy** — Nebraska
- **State budget policy** — Illinois
- **Medicaid expansion** — South Dakota
- **Legislative civility** — Nebraska and Ohio
- **Great Lakes and water policy** — Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota
Four featured speakers lined up for summer meeting of Midwest’s state legislators

Midwestern Legislative Conference will meet July 12-15 in North Dakota

The premier event for the Midwest’s state and provincial legislators, participants will have the chance to hear from leading political thinkers as well as some true American heroes. The Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting is a unique event.

The only meeting tailored to meet the needs and interests of legislators from the 11-state Midwest, the four-day event also includes participation from the elected officials of four neighboring Canadian provinces. Every policy session and committee meeting at the event focuses on the Midwest and its states, and legislators are also given ample opportunity to network and learn from one another.

But the MLC Annual Meeting also always features renowned, big-name speakers, and the 2015 event in North Dakota will be no exception. Astronaut Buzz Aldrin and leading national pollster John Zogby will give presentations, and Anne-Marie Slaughter will provide the keynote address on “Big Ideas for a New America.” Slaughter is the former policy planning director for the U.S. Department of State (the first woman to hold that position) and is now the CEO and president of the New America Foundation.

North Dakota native Clint Hill will be one of the meeting’s luncheon speakers. The former Secret Service agent was in the presidential motorcade when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He recounts that tragic day and his role in it in the 2013 book “Five Days in November.”

The meeting will be held July 12-15 in North Dakota’s capital city of Bismarck.

As in past years, the 70th Annual Meeting of the MLC will kick off with a series of all-day policy sessions hosted by the group’s five interstate legislative policy committees: Agriculture & Natural Resources, Economic Development, Education, Health & Human Services, and Midwest-Canada Relations.

The meeting will also offer professional-development training for legislators and will include sessions on energy policy, key fiscal issues in the states and early-childhood education.

The MLC meeting is a family-friendly event.

Scheduled speaker presentations

- **“Look to the Stars”**
  Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, second person to walk on the moon

- **“Big Ideas for a New America”**
  Anne-Marie Slaughter, CEO and president of New America Foundation

- **“Five Days in November”**
  Clint Hill, a Secret Service agent’s tale of tragedy, heroism and courage on the day JFK was killed

- **“Trends that Will Change Government, Business and Lives”**
  John Zogby, top national pollster and best-selling author

For the spouses and children of attendees, special daytime activities are being planned, and the meeting’s evening events (one at Fort Lincoln State Park, the other at the newly renovated Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck) will give participants the chance to meet and network with legislative colleagues from the Midwest.

Event registration will begin in early 2015 on the CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference website: www.csgmidwest.org. Please call the CSG Midwest office at 630.925.1922 with questions about the meeting.

New series of webinars on Great Lakes policy set for 2015

The Great Lakes Legislative Caucus plans to once again host a series of one-hour, webinar-based seminars for legislators and legislative staff interested in issues related to Great Lakes policy and protection.

The 2015 Great Lakes, Great Webinars series will begin Feb. 18 with a focus on the impact of nutrient runoff on Great Lakes water quality — and state efforts to reduce the amount of phosphorus and other nutrients entering the lakes and their tributaries.

Here is the rest of the schedule for 2015:

- **March 18** — “Energy Use and its Impact on the Great Lakes”
- **April 15** — “Legislative Update: Recent and Pending Actions that Affect the Great Lakes”
- **May 20** — “Invasive Species and the Great Lakes”
- **July 29** — “An Examination of Water Quality at Great Lakes Beaches”

**Great Lakes Legislative Caucus**

- **Dec. 16** — “Preview of Legislative Year in Great Lakes Policy”

Webinar registration can be completed via the CSG Midwest website: www.csgmidwest.org. CSG Midwest provides staff support to the caucus, which is led by Wisconsin Rep. Cory Mason (chair) and Michigan Sen. Darwin Booher (vice chair).
Illinois looks to help more workers save for secure retirement

The Illinois General Assembly passed first-of-its-kind legislation in December designed to help more workers save for retirement. Under SB 2758, Secure-Choice accounts will be offered to individuals who lack access to employer-based retirement plans. These individuals will have the opportunity to automatically deduct a portion of their paycheck into a retirement account. New businesses and those with fewer than 25 workers also can participate. Participants will be able to choose between higher- and lower-risk investment options. The accounts will not be funded or guaranteed by the state, notes state Sen. Daniel Biss, sponsor of SB 2758. However, the state-based program will pool individual retirement accounts, thus allowing for lower fees and diversified, professionally managed investments.

According to Boston College's Center for Retirement Research, half of the nation's private-sector workers do not have access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan. Partially as a result, fewer workers do not have access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan. The goal of the Illinois legislation is to help more families build wealth and plan for a secure retirement.

North Dakota may require students to pass citizenship test

Should high school students be required to pass a U.S. citizenship civics test as a prerequisite for graduating from high school? Some key state leaders in North Dakota believe so and will be introducing legislation in 2015, the Bismarck Tribune reports. Under the proposal, students would take a 100-point exam focusing on American government, history and geography; they would have to answer at least 60 of the questions correctly. The push for this mandatory test is coming in part from the Civics Education Institute — a national organization concerned that civics instruction is “being boxed out of the classroom today by an all-consuming focus on science, technology, English and math.”

Every state in the Midwest requires that high school students receive instruction or take a course in American government or civics. However, most states have stopped requiring students to pass a graduation test of any kind. The lone exception in this region is Ohio, where a five-part exam is given to students testing their knowledge of social studies and four other subject areas. Ohio students must pass all five parts of the test in order to receive a high school diploma.

In Ohio and Wisconsin, a state response to officer-related deaths

High-profile incidents involving police officers and the deaths of civilians have led to the passage of a new law in Wisconsin and creation of a state task force in Ohio. Under Wisconsin’s AB 409, police departments can no longer lead the investigation of incidents involving one of their officers. Instead, two outside investigators must be brought in (one to lead the investigation). Family members of the person killed, too, must be told of their legal rights. Lastly, if criminal charges are not filed in an officer-related death, information on the investigation must be released to the public.

Ohio’s new task force, meanwhile, will look at ways to improve relations between law enforcement and the people it serves, particularly those in minority communities. According to The Cincinnati Enquirer, the idea for the task force stems from discussions between Ohio Gov. John Kasich and three of the state’s African-American legislators. Sen. Nina Turner says the move “represents a first step to understanding what is going on, why it’s going on, and how we can begin to tackle it.”

This past year, in separate incidents, two African-Americans carrying BB guns were shot and killed by police in Ohio. Officers in the two cases were not indicted, the Enquirer reports.

Indiana teachers get $30 million for student performance, gains

Teachers across Indiana were in line for some bonuses this holiday season as the result of a performance-based grant program included in the state’s budget. According to the Lafayette Journal & Courier, more than $30 million went to 1,300 schools across Indiana. Schools were eligible for the grants if they met certain requirements: 1) Students scored well on statewide tests or showed signs of improvement, or 2) Graduation rates were high or had improved over the last year (growth of at least 5 percent). These schools, in turn, distribute the money to teachers who have been rated effective or highly effective under Indiana’s teacher-evaluation system.

“Pay for performance” models are spreading to more and more states, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality. In its latest “State Teacher Policy Yearbook,” the council lists 25 U.S. states as having policies in place to support performance pay. Those states include Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska and Ohio.

Indiana is singled out as one of two “best practice” states. Under a state law that took effect in 2011, a school district’s salary increases for teachers must be based in part on evaluations of their effectiveness. Conversely, years of experience and content-area degrees cannot account for more than 33 percent of the pay calculation.