**State-local relations get tested in new fiscal era**

More reductions in state aid and calls for efficiency

by Kate Tormey (ktormey@csg.org)

Even as the U.S. economy shows signs of a turn-around, local governments across the Midwest and nation are preparing for what Jacqueline Byers calls the "double whammy" set to cut into their primary source of revenue.

Property taxes, which account for 72 percent of local tax collections, have been affected for a few years now by the mortgage crisis that began in 2007.

But Byers says the revenue outlook will only worsen as communities face a new wave of foreclosures (due in part to high unemployment rates) and as decreased property values begin to be reflected on local property tax rolls. (Some local entities are on a three- or even five-year assessment cycle.)

"The bottom line is that there is no escape in sight for property taxes in most counties," says Byers, the director of research and outreach for the National Association of Counties.

On top of these revenue cuts, local governments are also facing higher expenditures due to factors such as rising oil prices. The result has been a trend in recent years toward "functional consolidation": the merging of specific services by entities that remain operationally separate but that combine certain services or staff functions.

"We have seen lots of functional consolidations in sheriff’s departments, libraries, planning and zoning, and animal control because it is much more efficient," Byers says. "If the county is using a trash truck two days a week, why should all of the cities have one, too?"

Complete consolidation, however, becomes trickier because elected officials have to give up power and local voters may be wary of losing a voice in government.

Since 1920, Byers says, there have been more than 100 attempts to merge local entities; 38 have been successful. In some cases, the same units have tried as many as four times.

That being said, there are successful examples of local government consolidations. And sometimes merging is the most financially feasible way to continue providing services.

"In some states, there is no reason, except history and sometimes the state constitution, why some of these small counties haven't merged," she says.

Consolidation — either by mandate or in response to incentives — is one strategy being considered this year in the Midwest's state capitols. Other efficiency measures are being given careful consideration as well, at a time when lawmakers are eying cuts to local governments as a budget-balancing fix — a move that will further squeeze the revenue base for cities, counties and other entities.

**Cuts in aid a continuing trend**

According to the U.S. Congressional Budget Office, 22 states reduced aid to local governments in 2010 and 20 proposed doing so in FY 2011.

More cuts are expected as states complete work on their next round of budgets.

This year in Nebraska, for example, lawmakers approved a bill that eliminates aid to counties, municipalities and natural resource districts. The measure is projected to save the state $44 million over two years as part of an effort to fill an overall $986 million state budget shortfall for the next biennium.

City managers testified to Nebraska legislators that LB 383 would result in a 2 percent cut in revenues.

With the state providing less, one idea is to expand revenue options for local governments beyond the property tax.
Issue Briefs cover topics of interest to the various groups and policy committees associated with the Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments. Located in suburban Chicago, CSG Midwest provides staffing services for the Midwestern Legislative Conference, Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee. More information is available at www.csgmidwest.org.

**Passenger Rail**

**States apply for remaining federal high-speed rail funding**

Although appropriations for the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) program were eliminated when the final federal budget for 2011 was passed in April, some funding for passenger rail development is still available.

The U.S. Department of Transportation accepted applications through April 4 for about $2 billion in HSIPR grants. The money came primarily from previously awarded funding returned by Florida.

Six members of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) — Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin — submitted 27 applications, totaling about $2.2 billion, for projects to buy modern equipment, renovate and build stations, improve lay track, and plan for future improvements.

The largest application is a collective request by Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin that would bring modern locomotives and train sets to eight routes in the region. The total order is for 31 engines and 100 coaches for the following routes: Chicago-Dubuque (Iowa); Chicago-Quincy (Ill.); Chicago-Carbondale (Ill.); Port Huron (Mich.); Chicago; Grand Rapids (Mich.); Chicago; Pontiac (Mich.); Chicago, Kansas City (Mo.); St. Louis; and Milwaukee-Chicago.

Such a large purchase would lower per-train costs significantly and help spur the nascent U.S. passenger rail equipment industry.

In February, MIPRC asked that priority be given to Midwestern states in any redirected funding. “Given that our [earlier] applications were supported by all of our states, and most of the funding that was turned back by Ohio and Wisconsin went to states outside of our region, we now request that priority be given to Midwestern states’ requests for funding,” MIPRC’s chair, Illinois Rep. Elaine Nekritz, stated in the request letter.

The governors of Florida, Ohio and Wisconsin had rejected federal funding for high-speed rail, believing that such spending is wasteful and could lead to extra spending by the states themselves.

During the earlier application rounds, Midwestern states had requested $12.5 billion and were awarded over $3 billion. Although about $1.2 billion of funding was returned by Ohio and Wisconsin, the remaining states are making improvements and necessary plans for the following routes: Chicago-St. Louis-Kansas City (Illinois and Missouri); Minneapolis/ St. Paul-Chicago (Minnesota); Chicago-Omaha (Illinois and Iowa); and Detroit/Pontiac-Chicago (Michigan, Illinois and Indiana).

These improvements are part of a larger, long-term plan to implement faster, more frequent passenger rail service throughout the Midwest.

The build-outs of these plans are projected to bring the region more than $30 billion in economic benefits, as well as a significant number of short- and long-term jobs, according to the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative.

**Agriculture & Natural Resources**

**Concerns remain after meat-inspection regulations finalized**

The final regulations for a program that will allow the interstate sale of state-inspected meat do little to address some of the concerns raised by state lawmakers when the preliminary rules were first released in 2009.

Allowing for such interstate sales was a hard-fought victory for smaller meat processors and those who had long advocated for it. The Midwestern Legislative Conference — led by its Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee — was among the groups that pushed for a repeal of the interstate ban. The repeal was included in the 2008 farm bill.

But will the new program and its regulations be workable?

State meat-inspection programs generally serve smaller meat processors and, in order to operate, have traditionally had to meet safety standards “at least equal” to those of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Ever since the preliminary rules were introduced, concerns have been raised about language regarding food safety standards. Instead of being “at least equal” to the federal program’s standards, the state programs have to be “the same.” This subtle change means that every time the federal program updates anything, even computers, the states must do the same.

As a result, instead of allowing for the interstate shipment of state-inspected products, the USDA’s regulations set up another federal inspection system under more stringent and inflexible provisions than the current federal system, members of the MLC committee said when the preliminary rules were introduced.

The final regulations for the program do nothing to address these concerns.

Another concern raised by state legislators involved provisions in the rules that limited participation to facilities with 25 or fewer employees — not just full-time employees or processing employees, but all workers. Under the final regulations, the 25-employee limit is retained, but workers whose duties do not involve handling any products will not be included in the limit. The same goes for unpaid volunteers.

A third concern about the regulations seems to have been addressed. Processors who opt to participate in the new program and its rules will be able to “opt out,” forgoing interstate shipments and sales instead of simply participating under the old rules for existing state programs. (Under the preliminary rules, this leeway was not provided to a plant wanting out of the new program.)

Nine of the 11 Midwestern states had inspection programs in place as of the beginning of this year. As of late April, it appeared Nebraska would become the 10th Midwestern state with passage of LB 305.
Brief written by Tim Anderson, who can be reached at tanderson@csg.org. Kate Tormey is the CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Health and Human Services Committee. She can be reached at ktormey@csg.org.

**Economic Development**

**Study: Revamp of higher education needed to transform and revitalize region’s economy**

The Midwest, once the national leader of the industrial economy, is now floundering in the knowledge- and innovation-driven global economy.

The way back to economic vitality and growth, says James Duderstadt in a report for The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, will require changes in another traditional strength of the region: “our extraordinary array of colleges and universities.”

“The Midwest region must make the commitment and the investments necessary to become the brains of the 21st-century knowledge economy,” says Duderstadt, president emeritus and professor at the University of Michigan. To do so, he adds, “We must rethink [higher education] and better leverage it.”

Along with his proposed reforms at the K-12 education level — setting high standards for student and teacher performance, extending the school year and implementing rigorous assessments for student learning — Duderstadt argues for far-reaching and implementing rigorous assessments for student education level — setting high standards for student education. Such reforms would have to be accompanied by adequate financial, instructional and counseling support for students.

In addition, policymakers could consider implementing new incentives: for example, basing public support on graduation rates rather than enrollments; making adequate staffing of required curricula a priority; and setting tuition levels to encourage early graduation.

“Explore alternative funding mechanisms for higher education, such as a ‘degree tax’ in which students pay for their education through differential tax of future earnings (income-contingent loan repayment) and ‘learn grants’ that encourage early learning by providing all students entering K-12 systems with college investment accounts.

Increase engagement between higher education and K-12 education to improve the quality of primary and secondary schools, including a greater commitment of post-secondary staff and resources.

Build public awareness about the value of higher education. Establish performance goals in which all students enrolled in Midwestern colleges and universities are expected to graduate in a prescribed period (one possible standard is six years). These goals would have to be accompanied by adequate financial, instructional and counseling support for students.

Supplement traditional schools with new higher education systems. These could include empowering each university to become more strategically engaged in regional and state economic development activities.

According to Duderstadt, given the importance of new innovation and knowledge to the region’s global competitiveness, priority should be given to the mission of research and graduate institutions. He also argues that universities should become more strategically engaged in regional and state economic development activities. That includes faculty and staff involvement in startup and spinoff high-tech businesses, as well as the investment of university assets in venture capital activities.

Duderstadt’s report was presented during a webinar hosted by the MLC Economic Development Committee in April. The webinar was part of a series on “Building a Competitive Midwest through Regional Collaboration.” For more about the webinar, visit www.csg.org.
Measures shoot down use of undercover video at farm operations

A
t is the case in many Midwestern states, animal agriculture is a critical economic sector in Iowa and Minnesota. Nationally, the two states rank third and eighth, respectively, for the market value of their livestock, poultry and other animal products. And this year, Iowa and Minnesota have received national attention for legislation that aims to protect this industry — namely from what proponents of these bills say are unfair, misleading attacks from animal-abuse whistle-blowers that make and distribute undercover video of farm operations.

Iowa's HF 589 calls for criminal penalties against individuals who film videos of farms by trespassing or without the owner's consent, unless all copies of the videos are provided to local authorities within 72 hours. (As of late April, the bill had passed the House but not the Senate.) Recent undercover videotaping done to expose alleged animal abuse (including on a dairy farm in Ohio and an egg farm in Iowa) has helped spur interest in enacting new laws.

"Videos have been cut and pasted and released to the press rather than to governmental authorities," says Iowa Republican Rep. Annette Sweeney, the sponsor of HF 589, adding that "oftentimes it is shown that the videos have even been staged." Meanwhile, there is an ongoing push by the Humane Society of the United States to pass state measures similar to California's Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act, a voter-approved measure that imposes stricter production standards on the agriculture industry.

Iowa House Republican Majority Leader Linda Upmeyer says HF 589 is "about helping to ensure that Iowa's role as a leading producer of food continues for my children and grandchildren." She and Sweeney say food safety is involved as well: Animal-abuse whistle-blowers traveling from one farm to the next could potentially spread disease. (Most operations today have biosecurity rules in place.)

Meanwhile, the United States as a whole continues to face a continuing rate of population decline.

Population loss in cities continues, with ‘black flight’ latest trend

T
e story of the population and economic decline of some of the Midwest's largest, historically most important cities did not begin in 2000 and will likely not end in 2010. Nonetheless, data from U.S. Census 2010 are striking in showing the extent of the out-migration from many of this region's central towns.

- Detroit lost a quarter of its people and had its lowest population count since 1920.
- Nine of Ohio's 10 largest cities lost population, with Cleveland leading the decline with the loss of more than 80,000 people.
- Among U.S. cities with 100,000 or more residents in 2000, 42 lost population. Close to half of those cities (18) are in the Midwest. Eleven of the 20 U.S. cities undergoing the sharpest population declines are from four states in this region — Illinois (one), Indiana (two), Michigan (three) and Ohio (five).

As Alan Mallach notes in a 2010 Brookings Institution study on America's distressed older cities, myriad factors have contributed to population and job losses for decades: Increased access to affordable mortgages and the rise of automobile ownership, for example, allowed people to buy homes and live in the suburbs, while declines in public services and increases in crime rates further contributed to out-migration patterns.

In the Midwest, in particular, the loss of manufacturing jobs has crippled local economies and, as a result, led to population losses. Mallach cites Dayton and Detroit as two examples: They lost 46 percent and 40 percent of their manufacturing jobs, respectively, in the 1970s.

Compounding these longer-term trends are more recent factors. Along with an overall decline in private sector employment over the past decade, some cities in the Midwest have been disproportionately affected by the rise in foreclosures and drop in housing prices. Mallach says.

Brookings demographer William Frey notes another significant demographic pattern uncovered in the Census 2010 data: what he calls "black flight" from cities such as Chicago and Detroit.

Frey's analysis of the latest data shows a reversal of 20th-century trends, with blacks now moving from northern cities to the South. And he says laws against housing discrimination along with better educational and economic opportunities for blacks have likely contributed to a second trend: a larger percentage of this minority group moving to the suburbs.

More than half of black residents living in metropolitan areas now reside in the suburbs, Frey concludes in his recent study of the federal statistics (51 percent in 2010 compared to 37 percent in 1990).

This national trend holds true throughout the Midwest, including in areas with traditionally low rates of black residents. In the suburbs of Indianapolis and Des Moines, Iowa, for example, the rates of black residents grew by 150 percent and 146 percent, respectively (the highest two rates in the nation).

This article was written by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org) as part of a series of articles on regional data from U.S. Census 2010. Previous articles examined rural population trends and congressional reapportionment. Mallach's and Frey's studies are available at www.brookings.edu/metro.aspx.
The North Dakota way

Legislative rules allowing all bills to reach floor reflect commitment to openness

Across the country, no two legislatures go about the business of lawmaking in exactly the same way. Still, for the most part, the basic procedures used in most capitols are similar enough that a visiting legislator would quickly recognize key features of the process in almost any state. Here in the Midwest, however, one legislature stands apart from the rest, thanks to a unique combination of traditions, operating authority, customized rules and subtle nuances that make it unlike any other in the region.

The North Dakota Legislative Assembly is different from other Midwestern legislatures in many ways.

For starters, it is the only legislative body in the region — and one of just four nationally (Montana, Nevada and Texas are the others) — that still meets only every other year. That could change some day. Nationally, the number of states with biennial legislative sessions has slowly dwindled in recent years, and over time, North Dakota has seen its share of proposals to move to annual sessions. But according to Jim Smith, director of the North Dakota Legislative Council, support for the existing system remains high.

The state’s lawmaking process itself is also unique. In most states, for example, there are numerous opportunities to derail or kill a bill long before it ever reaches the floor of the legislature. Not so in North Dakota, where every introduced bill is guaranteed both a hearing in committee and a final vote on the floor of the full House or Senate.

Lawmakers in other states, where legislative committees can and frequently do prevent proposed bills from advancing, often find this feature of the North Dakota process surprising. But the dean of the North Dakota Senate, Republican Sen. Dave Nething, says that North Dakota’s process reflects both the state’s progressive populist history and its traditional commitment to transparency in government.

Nething points out that legislative caucus meetings and committee hearings are all open to the public in North Dakota. Until the early 1970s, committees were permitted to hold executive sessions in order to vote on proposals behind closed doors, but since 1973, all committee votes have been required to be taken in open committee session. Nething says these rules help citizens to better understand the lawmaking process and, he adds, “raise the level of discussion among legislators.”

A 45-year veteran of the legislature, Nething also points out that the inability of committees to kill proposed legislation “tends to prevent the introduction of less serious proposals that might otherwise be introduced only to please a constituent.”

As in other legislatures, North Dakota committee members can recommend that bills be passed by the full body once they reach floor, but even proposals that fail to win committee approval continue to advance.

Smith says that most bills come to the floor with a “do pass” or a “do not pass” committee recommendation attached, but occasionally, they arrive without any committee recommendation at all.

Regardless, every introduced bill eventually receives a roll call vote on the floor of the full chamber in which it was proposed. This, too, reflects the state’s commitment to transparency in lawmaking.

“Our openness really is the key to effective government,” Nething says.

This article was written by Mike McCabe, director of the CSG Midwest Office. Only in the Midwest is an ongoing series of short articles that highlight a unique aspect of states and state governments in the Midwest. The first article in this series was on Nebraska’s use of a unicameral, nonpartisan legislature. If you have an idea for a future article, please contact Mike at mmccabe@csg.org.
Policymakers look for ways to encourage more efficiencies at local level of government

As of late April, a bill was advancing in Nebraska that would give municipalities more authority to raise local-option sales taxes. LB 357 would permit cities to levy a 2 percent sales tax with voter approval. Cities would be required to provide the public with a description of how the additional revenue would be used.

Under current Nebraska law, cities can raise taxes by 0.5 percent, 1 percent or 1.5 percent through a ballot initiative.

Proposals in Minnesota, too, would reduce general aid to local governments — and at least one would allow them to boost their own revenue sources.

Currently, local governments in Minnesota have a very limited revenue stream beyond property taxes, says Jay Kiedrowski, a senior fellow at the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs. While some communities have specific sales taxes related to hotels and convention centers, local entities do not have access to local-option general sales taxes.

“All the options they have [for increasing revenue] are to raise property taxes and to raise fees,” he says. Minnesota policymakers are considering measures that would scale back state programs that have traditionally provided property tax subsidies to local governments. Property tax relief programs and local government aid make up about $3.4 billion of Minnesota’s general-fund budget (close to 10 percent of the total).

One attempt to scale back aid to local governments was included in a budget bill that was vetoed early in the year by Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton.

HF 130 would have cut general aid to cities and counties by roughly $270 million over the next two years and reduced property-tax credit programs by about $210 million for the biennium. In addition, the bill would have made $100 million in cuts to a property-tax refund program for renters.

Another measure being considered by the Legislature, SF 27, would make similar cuts, and it would allow localities to impose a 0.5 percent sales tax, if approved by voters, in order to raise revenue.

Kiedrowski believes that if proponents of cutting general local aid are successful, “the safest bet” is that property taxes will go up as much as 30 to 40 percent.

Dayton cited the rise in property taxes as one reason for his veto of HF 130.

But Republican Rep. Mary Liz Holberg wrote soon after the Legislature passed this initial cost-cutting measure that would force local units of government to merge. In Kansas, for example, there are currently 105 counties. A bill introduced this session, SB 204, called for reducing that number by as much as three-quarters.

Under the bill, which failed to advance this year, the governor would have appointed a 12-member study commission to develop a strategy for consolidating counties, including consideration of a plan to reduce the total number to 23.

A 2009 Wichita State University study found that reducing the number of counties to 25 could cut statewide county expenditures by $826 million by reducing salaries, hospital expenditures, utility costs and other costs.

Illinois Democratic Sen. Terry Link says the time has come for similar review of local consolidation in his state.

“The financial burden we face is mounting, and Illinois currently has more units of local government than any state in the nation,” says Link, who wants a bipartisan commission to review the effectiveness of local governments and recommend ideas for eliminating or consolidating them.

“By consolidating these units, we will not only save the state money, but we’ll provide more efficient services to our residents.”

In a 2009 paper arguing for a change in Minnesota’s state-local fiscal relationship, John James — a former state revenue commissioner — says that the $3.4 billion spent on property tax relief goes into a “black hole, without regard to what results the spending at either the state or the local levels produces.”

And now more than ever, state legislators are wanting results.

Consolidation: Easier said than done

Many states in the Midwest have considered various measures that would force local units of government to merge. In Kansas, for example, there are currently 105 counties. A bill introduced this session, SB 204, called for reducing that number by as much as three-quarters.

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“By consolidating these units, we will not only save the state money, but we’ll provide more efficient services to our residents.”

Link points out that the state has many outdated and extraneous government entities, such as four tuberculosis sanitarium boards.

Some state policymakers, including Auditor Dave Yost, would like to allow townships to voluntarily merge, which is not currently permitted under state law.

These consolidated townships would be encouraged to write up their own new governing structures, but if they were unable to come to an agreement, they would have access to pre-written charters offered by the state. (As of early May, this proposal was included in the state’s budget bill, HB 153.)

Prior to this year, Indiana had been the most active state in the region on issues related to local government reform, with much of the legislative discussions and actions stemming from a 2007 report done by a commission appointed by Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels.

That study provided a host of ideas on how to restructure and streamline local government.

One recommendation was to eliminate the state’s more than 1,000 township boards. SB 405, introduced this year, would have done just that by transferring the boards’ duties to county governments. The bill, however, was defeated in February.

Talk of incentives, unfunded mandates

Reforming local government has been a key goal of Indiana Republican Sen. Randy Head, and he believes one way to make it happen is by rewarding local officials that successfully find cost savings — whether it is through sharing 911 dispatch centers, getting volume discounts with new purchasing agencies, or other means.
Under SB 26, which was awaiting the governor’s signature as of early May, local governments could retain parts of their levies and budgets that would otherwise be reduced because of government reorganizations or consolidations.

In the first year, local governments would receive 50 percent of the amount they cut from their budgets through efficiency. That percentage would scale back over four years until it remained permanently at 10 percent.

“If you find a way to be more efficient and save taxpayer money, you should get a reward for doing so,” he says.

Michigan, too, is looking for new ways to promote local efficiencies and reforms while it seeks budget savings for the state through cuts in local aid.

In his February budget address, Republican Gov. Rick Snyder proposed reducing the state’s revenue-sharing fund for municipalities by one-third, to $200 million. (The state has a second, constitutionally mandated revenue-sharing program.)

Snyder would also like to encourage local governments to merge by setting up a $5 million incentive fund. If governments want to take these ideas a step further, an additional option could be to set up metropolitan governments made up of several counties and cities. This form of consolidated government would also be voluntary, the governor says.

Other ideas in Snyder’s eight-point plan focus on pension and benefit reform, such as moving to defined-contribution retirement plans for new hires and requiring municipal employees to pay 20 percent of their health premiums.

One of Snyder’s more controversial ideas would make it easier for local units of government to share services. The proposal would remove collective-bargaining laws that say public employees cannot lose rank or pay when their jobs are shifted due to a government merger. He says that these laws make it more expensive for governments to cooperate because workers must essentially be offered the most generous contract of any participant in the merger.

Republican Rep. Eileen Kowall has sponsored legislation that would change this employment policy by amending the state’s existing Urban Cooperation Act, which governs labor contracts in intergovernmental mergers.

“It has been a huge disincentive to communities to share services,” Kowall says.

The package of legislation (HB 4309-4312) would eliminate various provisions that currently require entities that take over services to retain existing labor contracts. Instead, when governments agree to merge services, labor contracts would be renegotiated for an entire group of workers under a new authority. In addition, the “new employer” would no longer be obligated to provide workers with the same benefits, paid leave, seniority and pay that they received in their previous positions.

Another legislative goal of Kowall’s is to ease the burden of unfunded state mandates on local governments. Kowall, a former county commissioner, has helped develop a package of bills (HB 4038-4041) that would:

• require the state to finance the costs incurred by schools and local units of government in carrying out state mandates;
• create a state mandate panel to monitor whether the state is meeting its constitutional obligation to fund required programs and services;
• direct the state to study and report on whether proposed administrative rule changes would result in unfunded mandates; and
• speed up the process through which localities appeal unfunded mandates in court.

**State** | Median taxes paid* | Taxes as % of home value* | Taxes as % of median income*  
--- | --- | --- | ---  
Illinois | $3,507 (7) | 1.37% (6) | 5.17% (5)  
Indiana | $1,625 (26) | 0.85% (27) | 1.87% (17)  
Iowa | $3,569 (28) | 1.29% (15) | 2.68% (26)  
Kansas | $1,625 (24) | 1.29% (14) | 2.69% (25)  
Michigan | $2,145 (18) | 1.62% (8) | 3.88% (10)  
Minnesota | $2,098 (19) | 1.60% (19) | 1.00% (21)  
Nebraska | $2,164 (17) | 1.76% (5) | 3.62% (14)  
North Dakota | $1,625 (25) | 3.28% (10) | 2.67% (27)  
Ohio | $1,816 (22) | 1.36% (11) | 3.16% (20)  
South Dakota | $3,620 (27) | 1.28% (16) | 2.88% (23)  
Wisconsin | $2,098 (19) | 1.76% (4) | 4.97% (6)  
United States | $1,917 | 1.04% | 3.04%  

* U.S. rank in parentheses.
Two years ago, a state Supreme Court decision ruled that same-sex marriage should be permitted in Iowa. A year that would allow voters to decide whether to regulate assisted-living facilities. These institutions are one of the biggest contributors to small Main Street businesses closing up. We know that property taxes in Iowa are higher and for Iowans, we will get far better outcomes than for folks in California or New Jersey or Florida do, but we didn't want to turn those into nursing facilities," she says.

Upmeyer remains proud of the end result of her work on that bill, and she still uses the lessons she learned from the legislative experience.

"I know that as a legislature, we can make sure that folks in California or New Jersey or Florida do, but we didn't want to turn those into nursing facilities," she says.

Upmeyer remains proud of the end result of her work on that bill, and she still uses the lessons she learned from the legislative experience.

"I always keep in mind the person who is going to utilize a service — the client or the patient — and if you try to think of things from that perspective, you're going to be successful."
Illinois looks to educate young athletes about dangers of concussions

Legislation would require schools to adopt informational policies

by Illinois House Minority Leader Tom Cross (tom@tomcross.com)

Awareness growing about the frequency and effects of concussions

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by a blow or jolt to the head or even a blow to the body that causes the head to move rapidly back and forth.

- Each year, U.S. emergency departments treat an estimated 135,000 sports- and recreation-related TBIs, including concussions, among children ages 5 to 18.
- Some 300,000 sports- and recreation-related concussions are diagnosed nationwide among all ages each year. But the actual number is estimated to be seven times more because so many concussions go undiagnosed. Among organized team sports, football and ice hockey had the highest concussion rates.
- Athletes who have ever had a concussion are at increased risk for another concussion.
- Children and teens are more likely to get a concussion and take longer to recover than adults.

Illinois House Minority Leader Tom Cross, a Republican from Oswego, was first elected to the House in 1992.

Submissions welcome

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. We accept submissions on a wide range of public policy issues and state initiatives.

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@csg.org.
On a leadership path: 12 state officials from Midwest selected as CSG Toll Fellows

Twelve state officials from the Midwest, including six legislators, have been selected to participate in one of the nation’s premier leadership development programs.

This year’s Henry Toll Fellowship Program will be held Sept. 9-14 in Lexington, Ky. — home of the headquarters of The Council of State Governments.

Named after CSG’s founder, former Colorado state senator Henry Toll, the program is open to leaders in all three branches of state government. This year’s Toll Fellows were chosen by an eight-member panel of program alumni. Here are the six legislators from the Midwest who were selected this year.

• Indiana Sen. Ed Charbonneau, a second-term Republican who is a 2008 graduate of the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s regional leadership program, the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD).
• Illinois Rep. Robyn Gabel, a Democrat now serving in her second year in the state House.
• Kansas Sen. Jeff King, a Republican serving in his first year in the state Senate after a four-year stint in the Kansas House.
• Ohio Rep. Tom Letson, a third-term Democrat who serves as the ranking minority member on the House Ways and Means Committee.
• Nebraska Sen. Beau McCoy, a 2009 graduate of the BILLD program first elected to the unicameral Legislature in 2008.
• Iowa Republican Rep. Renee Schulte, a 2009 BILLD graduate and second-term member of the House who serves as chair of the Administration and Rules Committee.

The 2011 class of Toll Fellows from the Midwest is rounded out by a mix of officials from the executive and judicial branches of government:

• Iowa information technology administrator Matt Behrens,
• South Dakota secretary of transportation Darin Bergquist,
• Minnesota deputy secretary of state Beth Fraser,
• Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau deputy chief Cathlene Hanaman,
• Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Lawton Nuss, and
• Ohio Judge Mary Jane Trapp.

Toll alumni have gone on to serve as governors, members of U.S. Congress

In all, 48 state officials from across the nation have been chosen for the 2011 program.

Running six days and five nights, the Toll program offers a mix of sessions designed to stimulate personal assessment and growth, enhance communication skills and promote team-building. The program also offers a unique chance for state officials to work with one another and to establish lasting relationships that cut across state and party lines.

Toll Fellows is designed as a “graduate” level program that complements the leadership development programs offered by CSG’s regional offices, including the BILLD program in the Midwest.

The 25-year-old program has a long list of distinguished alumni. Fellows have gone on to serve as governors, secretaries of state, chief justices, speakers and members of the U.S. Congress.

Currently, four Toll alumni are serving as governors, seven are lieutenant governors, eight are secretaries of state, five are members of Congress and one is a state supreme court chief justice. The current U.S. secretary of labor, Hilda Solis, is a Toll graduate as well. For more information, including how to apply for a fellowship, please contact Krista Rinehart at krinehart@csg.org or 859.244.8249.

MLC committee chooses BILLD Fellows for 2011

Thirty-seven state lawmakers have been chosen by a bipartisan group of their peers to participate in the 17th Annual Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development.

That group, the Midwestern Legislative Conference BILLD Steering Committee, met in late April to complete this year’s competitive application and selection process. The committee is made up of legislators from 11 Midwestern states and is led by two co-chairs, Michigan Rep. Mark Meadows and Illinois Rep. Elaine Nekritz.

Here is a state-by-state list of legislators who were selected for the BILLD program.

• Illinois — Reps. Camille Y. Lilly, Tom Morrison and Carol Sente
• Indiana — Sen. C. Susan Glick and Reps. Mike Karickhoff and Jud McMillin
• Iowa — Reps. Joshua J. Byrnes, Daniel Kelley and Mary Lynn Wolfe
• Kansas — Reps. Sean Gatzweiler and Don Hineman and Sen. Jeff Longbine
• Michigan — Reps. Nancy Jenkins, Stacy L. Erwin Oakes and Amanda Price
• Minnesota — Reps. Kurt Daudt, Connie Doepke and Rena Moran
• Nebraska — Sens. Burke Hart, Ken Schilk and Jim Smith
• North Dakota — Reps. Corey Mock, Karen M. Rohr and Ronald Sorvaag
• Ohio — Reps. Marlene Asteleki and Connie Picklich and Sen. Gayle Manning

Four members of provincial legislative assemblies will also participate in this year’s BILLD program: Alberta MLA Wayne Drysdale, Manitoba MLA Matt Wiebe, and Saskatchewan MAs Danielle Chatteri and Gordon Wyclant.

The intensive five-day institute provides a mix of sessions on public policy and professional development. It will be held Aug. 12-16 in Madison, Wis.

BILLD Steering Committee co-chairs

Illinois Rep. Elaine Nekritz
Michigan Rep. Mark Meadows

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

What do the state of Indiana and its capital city have to offer? The guests of MLC Annual Meeting attendees will have the chance to find out this summer, by taking part in a series of spouse, youth and guest events that have been planned around the four-day event.

The meeting will be held July 17-20 in downtown Indianapolis.

Along with providing a unique opportunity for legislators to learn from policy experts and work with one another in a welcoming, nonpartisan environment, CSG is tracking developments across the Midwest and around the nation, and the MLC meeting has long served as a showcase for the host Midwestern state and city — and this year is no exception.

Day activities for spouses and other adult guests include walking tours of historic Indianapolis and a visit to the Indianapolis Museum of Art. In addition, trips to the Indianapolis Zoo, the NCAA Hall of Champions and the world-renowned Children’s Museum of Indianapolis have been planned for the children of attendees.

Evening events — for both MLC meeting attendees and their guests — include an opening night reception at Lucas Oil Stadium (home of the Indianapolis Colts and host of the 2012 Super Bowl) and Family Night at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

The meeting registration fee ($375 for legislators, $325 for first-time legislative attendees, $150 for adult guests and no charge for guests under 18) includes participation in all of these events.

High-profile speakers, high-priority issues

The meeting will kick off on Sunday, July 17, with a series of sessions led by the MLC’s five policy committees: Agriculture & Natural Resources, Economic Development, Energy, Health & Human Services, and Midwest-Canada Relations.

Other topics to be explored at the meeting include K-12 education reform; state efforts to improve teacher quality; the future of state transportation financing; recent changes in election law; collective bargaining and public employee labor law; and state budget problems and fixes.

This year’s meeting speakers include NPR national politics correspondent Mara Liasson, leading U.S. political journalist Ron Brownstein and public leadership expert Phil Boyle (see ad on page 7 for details).

In addition, Dante Chinni, director of the Patchwork Nation project, will provide a fascinating and unique look at the demographic makeup of the Midwest.

Online and printable registration forms are available at www.csgmidwest.org.

State Budgets 2012: CSG offers one-stop shop for information on fiscal research and strategies

The most difficult fiscal period in decades has led to tough budget decisions and some innovative solutions in state capitols across the country, and CSG is tracking these developments with a new online resource.

State Budgets 2012, housed online at The Council of State Governments’ Knowledge Center, provides policymakers with access to original CSG research and reports, as well as links to current news and state-based resources.

The goal is to give state leaders the chance to learn about the strategies and innovative practices being employed by states to close budget deficits and address other fiscal issues.

Here is the web address for State Budgets 2012: www.csg.org/statebudgets2012.

Over the next few months, too, CSG policy staff will be completing several new budget-related studies:

• a look at the impact of the loss of Recovery Act funds;
• a state-by-state analysis of tax incentive programs for business and the accountability systems that states have in place (this is an update of the 2000 CSG report “State Business Incentives”); and
• an examination of the findings and recommendations of various state government efficiency commissions.

For more information on these reports, or the other policy work being done by CSG, please contact Jennifer Burnett at 859.244.8114 or jburnett@csg.org.
has become the ninth state in the nation. The amount of the scholarship will be based on family income, with the state auditor for help.

Legislation passed in April (SB 4) requires that four performance audits of state agencies be conducted each biennium. Those audits can be of the entire agency or of a particular program or entity within it. The state auditor will consult with the governor and legislative leaders on what agencies to review each biennium.

SB 4 also establishes a new fund to make loans available to state agencies to pay for the costs of the performance audits. At the conclusion of each agency review, the auditor will offer recommendations for cost savings and operational improvements. Agencies that do not follow the recommendations will have to report back to the legislature on why the proposals were not implemented.

In a 2008 report, The Pew Center on the States recommended that legislatures expand the capacity of auditor general’s offices in order to improve government performance. That Pew study, “Grading the States,” singled out three Midwest states for having strong auditing systems in place: Kansas, Michigan and Minnesota.

North Dakota latest state to strike back against bullying

North Dakota has become the ninth state in the Midwest to enact a law designed to combat the problem of bullying in schools. Signed into law in April, HB 1465 requires school districts to establish anti-bullying policies and to train school staff on how to prevent conduct that harms students or interferes with their educational opportunities.

The bill received overwhelming support in the North Dakota Legislative Assembly. The Bismarck Tribune reports, though at least one lawmaker derided the measure as “nanny-state government run amok.”

With North Dakota’s actions this year, Michigan and South Dakota are the only states in the Midwest (and two of five in the United States) without anti-bullying statutes, according to the advocacy organization Bully Police USA.

That group says Ohio has the region’s strongest anti-bullying law. It grades state statutes laws on several criteria, including the strength of provisions that track school districts’ progress in implementing the anti-bullying policies. The top-rated state laws (none in the Midwest) also include anti-cyberbullying clauses and ensure that victims receive counseling.