Land Conservation Policies Take Center Stage at MLC Meeting

During expert-led session, legislators learn how new investments, partnerships with agriculture producers can improve the environment — and bottom lines.

“Give back to the land so it continues to produce for you,” Cammack said of one of the lessons learned from his decades of ranching.

Three years ago, Cammack Ranch was awarded the Leopold Conservation Award, a recognition of the family’s many successful practices over the past three decades — for example, the use of rotational grazing, the planting of tens of thousands of trees, and decisions that minimized the beef herd’s movement near water sources.

This year, under the leadership of Cammack, the MLC has been examining state policies that help the Midwest’s farmers and ranchers “give back” and prosper as a result. Three expert speakers joined Cammack for a featured session on this topic at the July meeting. It was held as part of his MLC Chair’s Initiative for 2021. One of the takeaway messages for legislators: If you’re interested in broader issues of environmental protection, you need to look for ways of assisting your state’s agricultural producers.

“Nearly three quarters of the land in the continental United States is privately owned, and the vast majority of that land is in working farms, ranches and forests,” said Kevin McAleese, president and CEO of the Sand County Foundation, which runs the Leopold Award program for conservation-leading private landowners. “So if you care about clean water and open space and wildlife recreation, you need to care about private landowners.”

NEWPARTNERSHIPS, INVESTMENTS IN OHIO

Lake Erie is one of the crown jewels of Ohio. But pollution runoff has degraded its water quality, led to harmful algal blooms and special edition of Stateline Midwest: Coverage of the 2021 Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting

This edition of Stateline Midwest highlights the sessions held and actions taken at this summer’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. The Council of State Governments provides staff support to the MLC: a bipartisan, nonpartisan association of legislators from the Midwest’s U.S. states and Canadian provinces.

This year’s event, held July 11-14 in South Dakota, marked the 75th Annual Meeting of the MLC. It was hosted and chaired by South Dakota Senate Majority Leader Gary Cammack. CSG-Midwest thanks all MLC participants, speakers and sponsors for making this landmark meeting a success, and greatly appreciates the many hours of work put in by South Dakota’s host legislators and staff at the Legislative Research Council.

Inside this issue, you will find articles on sessions hosted by the MLC’s policy committees and led by various keynote speakers. You will also learn about actions taken by the full MLC, including the passage of resolutions on topics such as federalism, chronic wasting disease, food-labeling laws and reopening the Canada-U.S. border.
‘Short-term’ or ‘generational’ impact? Critical choices ahead in mitigating learning loss from past school year

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

A look back at the last school year is a reminder of the educational imperatives that lie ahead for state and their school districts.

Tiffany Sanderson, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Education, put the stakes this way to lawmakers who attended a July session of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting:

Effectively re-engage students who were chronically absent or who fell behind academically due to a year of instructional disruptions and alterations, and you’ve contained the problem to a "short-term educational impact.”

Or you’ve contained the problem to a "short-term educational impact."

"You’ve contained the problem to a..." said the second speaker, Phillip Lovell, focused on the impacts of COVID-19 and related policies on student achievement.

"There are now even greater gaps in learning, especially among our historically underserved students," said Lovell, associate executive director of the Alliance for Excellent Education.

Nationwide analyses comparing academic gains during two different school years — the pandemic year of 2020-'21 vs. the non-pandemic year of 2018-'19 — show that majority and low-income students were hit the hardest.

"Students who were more likely to be in remote learning..." said Love, associate executive director of the Alliance for Excellent Education.

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In South Dakota, during a typical year, about 3 percent of students miss 30 or more days of school. That rate of chronic absenteeism more than doubled in 2020-'21, Sanderson said. These higher rates tended to be in schools providing virtual rather than in-person learning. More than half of the state’s chronically absent students were Native American and 80 percent were low-income.

Lovell singled out three post-pandemic challenges for all states to address. One is helping students catch up from lost learning opportunities over the past year. Options include developing summer learning and enrichment activities, extending the school day and year, and investing more in tutoring and evidence-based interventions.

He also emphasized the importance of closing digital divides that leave students without access to high-speed home internet.

Lastly, he said, new policies are needed to improve postsecondary readiness. Currently, only about 37 percent of graduating high school students are prepared for college-level math and reading. 70 percent of beginning students at two-year colleges require remedial coursework.

According to Lovell, states can improve these numbers in part by strengthening the rigor of K-12 curricula and expanding access to college-credit courses.

He singled out a competency-based education model in Georgia known as "Move on When Ready," a requirement in Indiana that high schools offer two advanced placements and two dual-enrollment courses, and a new law in California that incentivizes schools to develop high-quality career and technical education courses.

$123 BILLION OPPORTUNITY

One huge opportunity for states: the American Rescue Plan Act, which sets aside $123 billion for states and school districts to spend on education between now and 2026.

"There are often strings attached to money that comes from Washington," Lovell said. "These dollars have as few strings as possible attached to them." In South Dakota, the money will go to three priority areas, Sanderson said.

One is improving the recruitment and retention of educators. The second is better addressing the social-emotional needs of young people, an area that Sanderson said was "the highest need expressed" during recent listening sessions held across the state. Lastly, South Dakota will explore new ways of delivering instruction, with less emphasis on seat-time requirements in favor of a personalized, competency-based model.

"Help students understand when they’re ready to do so," she explained, "and have more time and attention given where they might be at risk or in need of additional support.”

To advance the competency-based model, South Dakota is investing in new teacher training and expanding the availability of digital-learning options.

Most states have landed on sound fiscal footing — after a roller-coaster year caused by the pandemic

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

When most states closed their books this summer on fiscal year 2021, the vast majority of them had revenue collections that outpaced their budget forecasts. That’s not so unusual in a typical fiscal cycle.

But in the year of a pandemic, when economic activity was curtailed or even shut down, few if any fiscal analysts were predicting such sound conditions.

"We were wrong; what happened is a lot of things were done right,” Shelby Kerns, executive director of the National Association of State Budget Officers, said in July at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

For example, federal stimulus dollars propped up state income and sales taxes.

States themselves, meanwhile, had successfully fought for the authority to collect sales taxes from e-commerce transactions. And during the first quarter of calendar year 2021, e-commerce accounted for 13.6 percent of total U.S. sales; that compares to 7.8 percent five years ago.

"Can you imagine the trouble that states..." said Kerns, executive director of the National Association of State Budget Officers.

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In South Dakota, the money will go to closing digital divides that leave students without access to high-speed home internet.

To advance the competency-based model, South Dakota is investing in new teacher training and expanding the availability of digital-learning options.

They are the committee’s co-chairs.

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Most states have landed on sound fiscal footing — after a roller-coaster year caused by the pandemic

Students’ academic growth during 2020-’21 school year compared to growth in 2018-’19 — as measured by changes in median scores on the MAP test (measure of academic progress)

Grade and subject

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<th>Low-poverty schools</th>
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<td>Eighth-grade math</td>
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* Figures represent the difference in percentile points. Student learning gained in 2018-'19 — as measured by changes in median scores on the MAP test (measure of academic progress)
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Hit hard by pandemic, many women, minority and non-degreed workers still face labor-market challenges

by Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csj.org)

The pandemic-related dip in jobs and employment outlook often has been referred to as the “she-recession” because of its disproportionate, adverse impact on female workers. Economist Michael Horrigan told legislators in July that federal data on employment tell a slightly more nuanced story. It’s a “less-than-B.A. recession,” he said, “with significant impacts on women and minorities.”

Likewise, many groups of workers without postsecondary degrees or credentials continue to struggle even as the U.S. economy grows. “Those with less than a Bachelor’s degree have had an especially difficult time regaining employment since April 2020,” Horrigan, president of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, said during a session organized by the Midwestern Legislative Conference Economic Development Committee.

During the first few months of the pandemic (February to April 2020), overall employment declined by 22.2 million jobs. This drop was highly concentrated in lower-wage sectors and establishments — 64 percent of the national total. “Ten industries alone accounted for over half of those employment declines,” said Horrigan, noting huge losses in jobs related to hospitality, entertainment, travel, retail and child care.

Women have had a higher rate of job loss relative to their employment status, and in particular, minority women have been at a greater risk of labor market-related displacement and disruption. For example, as of February 2020, minority women represented less than 12 percent of employment; they accounted for nearly 21 percent of the people who lost jobs between February and April 2020. “This is a really important lesson in terms of who got hurt by the pandemic,” Horrigan said.

Bouncing back for many displaced workers has not been easy. As of June 2021, more than 42 percent of the nation’s population of jobless workers were “long-term unemployed.” This means they had been out of work and searching for a job for 27 weeks or longer. “The labor market is changing in terms of skill requirements,” Horrigan said. “These [long-term unemployed] are the folks who are going to have the hardest, long-term problems in the labor market.”

Minorities make up a disproportionate share of the nation’s long-term unemployed: 23.9 percent and 17.1 percent for minority males and females, respectively, as of May. Horrigan suggested that policymakers also pay close attention to trends in the “near unemployed”: individuals who have been laid off, either temporarily or permanently, but are not yet searching for work. This group is considered out of the labor force and not counted as unemployed. “(Some) are coming back in,” he said, “or we hope they are coming back in.”

As of June 2021, nearly 7 million individuals who were out of the labor force reported that they wanted a job now. But they cited various factors: child care, family responsibilities, transportation, etc. — for not seeking work.

Among this group of the “hidden” or “near unemployed,” there is a disproportionate share of females without a college degree as well as minority females. It is unknown how many of these workers will remain out of the labor force or for how long, Horrigan said. He urged legislators to focus on strategies that help bring them back to the workplace.

Laura Tomaka is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the MLC Economic Development Committee.

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY**

With more jobs requiring occupational licenses, states look to remove obstacles for formerly incarcerated

by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csj.org)

Sixty years ago, about one in 20 jobs required an occupational license. Today, it’s four in five. That trend has closed many employment and career opportunities for individuals with a criminal record because of another figure: 13,000, the approximate number of provisions in state law that serve as barriers to licensure, according to the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction.

As lawmakers learned in July at a session of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, states have begun to chip away at those barriers. These fair-chance licensing reforms have several objectives: Give individuals a greater chance at re-entry success, make them less likely to reoffend, and meet a state’s workforce needs.

Organized by the MLC’s Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, the session featured presentations by officials and Korey Johnson of The Council of State Governments’ Justice Center and Adam Diering of the CSJ Center of Innovation. Together, they briefed lawmakers on different ways to remove barriers to licensure. For instance, Minnesota and other states have determined that certain low-level offenses do not pose a public safety risk. They now broadly prohibit such offenses from being considered in licensing applications.

In states such as Indiana, Kansas and Ohio, after a certain period of conviction-free years, individuals are less likely to have their criminal records stand in the way of securing a license. It is because of laws that reflect what the data show about the likelihood of reoffense: it declines significantly as more and more time passes from when the conviction occurred.

Another policy idea is to enact procedural protections at the back end of the licensing process. North Dakota and Ohio are among eight states that require a written explanation of specific reasons for conviction-based denials. This provides applicants with a record for challenge or appeal, and informs them of possible remedies. It also ensures that licensing bodies are properly applying the law.

On the front end, states can inform applicants about what licenses are possible. Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin provide preapplication determinations letting individuals know if they have criminal records that are disqualifying. “The hope is that these policies can improve employment outcomes,” according to the Prison Policy Initiative, 27 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals are unemployed. Figures are even higher for women and people of color. Formerly incarcerated Black women, for example, have a jobless rate of nearly 44 percent; that compares to 6 percent for Black women in the general population.

Mitch Arvidson is CSJ Midwest staff liaison to the MLC Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee.

**FAIR LICENSING PROVISIONS IN MIDWEST**

Fully implemented: explicit ban on consideration of pardoned, sealed and expunged records as well as requirement that applicants and their convictions get individualized consideration

Partially implemented: explicit ban on consideration of pardoned, sealed and expunged records. Fully implemented requirement that applicants and their convictions get individualized consideration

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Partially implemented: explicit ban on consideration of pardoned, sealed and expunged records. Source: CSJ Justice Center, Josh Gaines and Korey Johnson
Addressing rise in mental health needs, rebuilding public health systems loom as big challenges for states

by Jan Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

Addressing the rise in mental health needs, rebuilding public health systems loom as big challenges for states, according to a presentation at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. The session was sponsored by the MLC Health & Human Services Committee.

Since April 2014, Plotnik’s organization has conducted 10 million online screenings. This early-identification tool is for individuals potentially in need of help, for conditions such as depression and anxiety (the conditions for which people most commonly sought screenings). The COVID-19 pandemic led to a spike in those seeking assistance, and the screening results showed that the pandemic had a profound, negative effect on the nation’s mental health.

Since 2014, 72 percent of the people seeking screenings were women, Plotnick said, and more than 63 percent were young people between the ages of 11 and 17, experiencing high levels of depression and anxiety. “What we’re finding is that nearly half of young people who are coming to Mental Health America are expressing thoughts of suicide every day,” Plotnick said.

Policy response for states: Invest more in school-based mental health. Such a strategy can help reach young people early on, avert a crisis and improve long-term outcomes, Plotnick said. For example, about 70 percent of youths in state juvenile justice systems have a diagnosable mental health disorder, according to a report of state and local jail populations.

Many new school-based initiatives are underway in the Midwest. In Ohio, lawmakers have made a $675 million funding commitment in their two-year budget for schools to provide comprehensive, wraparound services to students. The most common service being provided is mental health. Minnesota, meanwhile, funds one of the longest-running, school-based programs in the country. There, mental-health practitioners partner with local districts and come to the schools to provide direct care and treatment, assessments of student needs and staff training.

During the MLC session, Plotnick recommended that states consider policies that replace police officers in schools with mental-health practitioners. 

• Ensure that recent gains in telehealth become permanent. “What we’ve learned from the pandemic is that telehealth is a tremendous tool,” she said. Options for states include allowing telehealth in programs such as Medicaid or requiring payments for this type of service by private insurers. This year, South Dakota became one of the first U.S. states to pass a law (SB 96) on telehealth; it made temporary rule changes from the pandemic permanent.

• Fund community-based, mobile mental health crisis teams that can respond to emergencies.

• Expand Medicaid coverage for new moms to 12 months after the birth of a child. In April, Illinois became the first state to secure a federal waiver for this kind of extension. (Coverage typically only extends to 60 days postpartum.)

• Increase the availability of mental health screening programs, especially for at-risk youths.

• Direct federal funds under the Families First Prevention Services Act to keep-at-risk families together by providing services for mental health and substance-use disorders.

ACTION ON PUBLIC HEALTH

The pandemic also illustrated the danger of continued inaction in rebuilding public health systems, Sandra Melstad, a public health consultant and owner of South Dakota-based SLIM Consulting, LLC, told legislators. “If you’re an elected official, you’re part of the public health system,” she said.

Less than 3 percent of the $3.6 trillion spent annually on health is directed to public health and disease prevention, she said, and prevention is being funded at the same level as in 2001 — an effective cut of 23 percent when inflation is considered.

She pointed to several consequences of this underfunding: shortages in public health workforces, and a lack of access to resources that otherwise make disease prevention and preparedness possible. According to Melstad, the pandemic also shed light on continuing public health inequities, an issue that demands an even more comprehensive response.

Melstad, the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s two other officers are Manitoba Minister Rajasthan Gill, co-chair, and Manitoba MP Popy Boudreau, co-chair.

Tim Anderson is CSG Midwest publications manager.

owed hope that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is behind the Midwest, legislators heard from two policy experts in July who stressed the need for new investments in mental health and public health systems.

“The mental health tsunami is already upon us,” Dezenski said.

The case for ‘ally shoring’: Legislators hear plan for rewiring supply chains to make them more resilient

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

E arly in the COVID-19 pandemic, a long-standing, but overlooked, threat to U.S. economic, health and national security was laid bare.

“We realized that our dependence on critical supply chains often led back to China,” Elaine Dezenski, a senior advisor to the Foundation for Defense of Democracy, said in July during a presentation at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. That was most immediately felt because of an inadequate supply of personal protective equipment. “We were not the first in line to receive PPE,” Dezenski said.

These supply-chain vulnerabilities extend to many other areas. Take, for example, the manufacturing of semiconductors, a necessary component of many critical industries. They are part of the electric grid and telecommunications systems, and are needed to make everything from new cars to smartphones to fighter jets.

Since 1990, the U.S. share of global semiconductor production has slumped from 37 percent to 12 percent, according to a June report of the White House. The same report noted that China controls an estimated 55 percent of the capacity to mine rare-earth metals (used to make batteries, engines, defense equipment, etc.), as well as 85 percent of refining capacity.

The pandemic was a call to action, but John Austin, director of the Michigan Economic Center, warned policymakers to learn about vulnerabilities in their own supply chains. “We want to keep doing business with China and everybody else, but not in areas where it is detrimental to our interests and our allies’ interests,” Austin said.

He recommended that legislators learn about vulnerabilities in their own jurisdictions, and then advocate for necessary changes in trade policy. “The pressure to act is going to come from the state level,” Austin said.

The MLC’s Midwest-Canada Relations Committee organized this session on ally shoring at the Annual Meeting.

This binational committee has long served as a forum for state and provincial legislators to discuss trade issues and to provide a voice for the Midwest. Austin said the economies of this region’s states and provinces already are “tightly wound” and “interdependent,” and have much to gain from what he called a “rewiring” of critical supply chains.

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Legislators explore promise of career and technical education, as well as funding options for states

by Carolyn Orr (carolyn@stawidgewindfarm.us)

During the 2018-19 school year, more than 750,000 students in the Midwest chose an academic path that they hoped would also start them on a successful career journey. One of the most popular tracts chosen by these career and technical education (CTE) students: agriculture, an industry that is critical to many of the region’s communities and that provides a diverse mix of job opportunities.

“CTE programs are reflective of local communities’ industries and needs, from corn and hogs in rural Iowa to food production in the Twin Cities of Minnesota to fisheries in northern Wisconsin,” Laura Hasselquist, an assistant professor of agricultural education at South Dakota State University, said during a July session of the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Along with agriculture, the other four most popular CTE career tracts in the Midwest are health care, business, human services, arts and information technology.

Local, state and federal funds are used to support this education model, which is for all ages but is perhaps most often associated as an alternative for high school students. According to Hasselquist, graduation rates are higher, and dropout rates lower, among these students.

“Part of the reason [why] is that CTE provides students with the opportunity to apply lessons learned in other classes to real-world settings,” she said. “This reinforces the academic lessons and makes them stick.”

The funding of CTE can be just as varied as the programs themselves. According to a 2014 U.S. Department of Education study, some states fund local programs out of general state-aid formulas, but there is no specific earmark for CTE. Other states have student- or cost-based formulas that set aside funds for CTE programming.

A third model is to dedicate money for area-wide CTE centers that support students in multiple school districts. Mark Pogliano, principal and CTE director of the Jackson Career Center in Michigan, discussed with legislators how these varying funding methods are used in his home state.

While all of the CTE programs rely on state and federal funding, he said, 33 of Michigan’s school districts have a portion of their property taxes dedicated to vocational education. The Jackson Area Career Center, for example, oversees a program that receives $1 million a year from the local millage tax. This region of the state has one central career center that serves 12 local districts and offers a centralized CTE program.

In other parts of the state, school districts work together but do not have a centralized CTE center. Instead, participating schools house specific CTE programs. A third option is for individual schools and districts to have stand-alone CTE programs of their own. Regardless of the model, Pogliano said, state support is critical. He encouraged legislators to work toward implementing sustainable funding models that encourage growth in CTE programs.

This July session was organized by three MLC committees: Agriculture & Natural Resources, Economic Development and Education.

Carolyn Orr is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the MLC Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee.

Agenda & Natural Resources
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A nation riven with strife and seemingly split into two irreconcilable halves, each claiming to be the “real” America; what is a legislator in such days to do? To whom can he or she turn for inspiration? Acclaimed historian and best-selling author Ronald C. White suggests one of the nation’s first presidents from the Midwest, Abraham Lincoln.

“He can’t help us with climate change, he can’t tell presidents what to do about Afghanistan,” White said in a featured presentation in July at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. “But his words, ideas and values stretch across time.”

For meeting attendees, White traced that wisdom through Lincoln’s own words, from his Young Men’s Lyceum speech in January 1838 to his second inaugural address in March 1865. In the speech, Lincoln already foresaw that American democracy can only be undone by its citizens.

“At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

Lincoln was a man of his time — the early to mid-19th century — and should be judged by the standards of his day, not ours, White said. He became a politician before he became a lawyer, and he decided to become a great public speaker. His humility and ability to note and deal with failure, as expressed in notes for a July 1850 law lecture, are illustrative: “I am not an accomplished lawyer. I find quite as much material for a lecture in those points where I have failed, as in those wherein I have been moderately successful. . . . Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser — in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a surprising opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.”

“Can you imagine a modern politician/lawyer [saying likewise]?” White asked attendees before quipping, “You don’t have to answer that.” White closed with perhaps the best-known portion of Lincoln’s second inaugural address in March 1865: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

Words about democracy. Words of personal humility. Words of respect and compassion for others. “Lincoln’s wisdom still speaks to us today,” White said. “They’re 19th-century words, but I think we need to hear them in the 21st century.”

**States play central role in policies that can foster more-inclusive economic growth**

To make the case for policies that promote greater economic inclusion, one place to start is with the data.

And researchers at the Federal Reserve have recently made some powerful claims about the link between closing racial, ethnic and gender gaps and growing the broader economy. They looked at 15 years of U.S. Census Bureau statistics on disparities in income, number of hours worked, employment-to-population ratios and educational attainment. Their conclusion: A closing of gaps in these areas would have boosted annual, overall GDP during this time in every Midwestern state, anywhere from $4.0 billion in South Dakota to $32.0 billion in Illinois.

Tawanna Black, a featured speaker at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting and former chairwoman of the Minnesota State Chamber of Commerce, pointed out these findings during a presentation that urged lawmakers to think about addressing inequality across all policy areas. “Did you have an economy worth recovering? How do you know?” she asked. “Did that economy work for everybody in your state? How do you know? Did data point you in that direction?”

The challenges of creating an equitable economy pre-date us, but we are in a position to make things better, Black said, adding that one tool to help make informed policymaking decisions is the use of racial-equity notes for proposed legislation. Similar in intent to fiscal notes (already commonly used in legislatures) or environmental impact statements, these notes would seek to anticipate a bill’s potential impact on minority communities.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

“Can you imagine a modern politician/lawyer [saying likewise]?” White asked attendees before quipping, “You don’t have to answer that.” White closed with perhaps the best-known portion of Lincoln’s second inaugural address in March 1865: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

Words about democracy. Words of personal humility. Words of respect and compassion for others. “Lincoln’s wisdom still speaks to us today,” White said. “They’re 19th-century words, but I think we need to hear them in the 21st century.”

**Futurist identifies four threats that he says need immediate attention from today’s political leaders**

Foreign adversaries waging misinformation campaigns to divide the country. Citizens unable to agree on a shared, factual view of the world. Changes in the climate overwhelming state and local infrastructure systems. Ransomware attacks wrecking economic havoc on businesses and governments alike.

These four threats endanger stability and prosperity in what futurist Ben Hammersley called a coming era of “hyper modernity.”

“No matter how uncomfortable they are to accept, we now have to accept and work [to address] those problems,” Hammersley said in July during the keynote session of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. “Any bit of energy that is left against them is shameful.”

Futurist Ben Hammersley delivers the keynote address at this year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. (photo: Johnny Sundby)

His message to legislators: Act now, because your states and provinces need your leadership and foresight. “If you’re not building systems within your states to protect people’s ability to think, if you’re not building systems to protect your digital infrastructure, if you don’t build these systems to protect your economic and environmental infrastructures, then you will lose,” he said.

These threats existed before COVID-19, and the pandemic may present what Hammersley called a “weird opportunity” for everyone to start thinking about the way they make, to reevaluate and reinvent how they do things and what they value. “It starts to lead people into the context of thinking about, well, can I be something else? Can we be something else?” he said. “By calling everything into question for practical reasons, the COVID pandemic has actually made everything possible in many ways.”

Some adaptive, outside-the-box thinking may be needed to address the four threats he laid out for legislators. “Every generation that comes into the context of thinking about, well, can I be something else? Can we be something else?” he said. “By calling everything into question for practical reasons, the COVID pandemic has actually made everything possible in many ways.”

“At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

Lincoln was a man of his time — the early to mid-19th century — and should be judged by the standards of his day, not ours, White said. He became a politician before he became a lawyer, and he decided to become a great public speaker. His humility and ability to note and deal with failure, as expressed in notes for a July 1850 law lecture, are illustrative: “I am not an accomplished lawyer. I find quite as much material for a lecture in those points where I have failed, as in those wherein I have been moderately successful. . . . Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser — in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a surprising opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.”

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His words, ideas and values stretch across time.”

Historian Ronald White on the value of today’s political leaders studying the speeches and personal letters of Abraham Lincoln.
caused the town of Toledo to temporarily lose its supply of drinking water due to contamination.

To address this environmental problem, changes on Ohio’s private, working agricultural lands had to be part of the solution. 85 percent of phosphorus loading into Lake Erie in Ohio comes from farms in the watershed. As part of a larger initiative known as H2Ohio, the state is now partnering with agricultural producers in high-priority areas to spread the use of conservation practices that reduce pollution runoff.

Dorothy Pelanda, director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, said this new initiative is unlike any other in the state’s history because of the level of funding and the commitment to employing a science-based approach.

Before reaching out to farmers, her department brought together scientists, along with leading agricultural and environmental groups, to develop a plan of action. According to Pelanda, this group explored lessons in water protection from around the world, scrutinizing various practices in agricultural conservation.

“We said to the governor, what we’re going to do is focus on seven practices that the best science and data say will retain nutrients and water on the land,” she said.

Their proposal to Gov. Mike DeWine: Pay farmers for the development of a nutrient management plan, as well as implementation of one or more of those evidence-based practices, such as planting cover crops, installing new drainage systems, or changing how fertilizers are applied.

In the first year of H2Ohio, DeWine and the legislature made $50 million in incentives available for farmers to adopt these practices. Just as important as the state’s commitment, Pelanda said, was securing buy-in from agriculture producers in the high-priority areas.

“I remember our first meeting in Perry County when we set up 300 chairs, and we had over 900 people show up,” she said. “From there, the number of producers showing up at the meetings was close to 1,000.

“It was a real testament to commitment to voluntary conservation.”

More than 1 million acres of land were enrolled in the program in its first year. “We know that these practices work, but we need to get more acreage involved,” Pelanda said. That will take a long-term investment from the legislature, as well as participation by a much larger number of farmers.

**BRIDGE BETWEEN RURAL, URBAN**

In Minnesota, studies have shown that the net profits of agricultural operations participating in a voluntary, state-run water quality certification program are higher than those not in the program. These findings show that conservation practices can help farmers’ bottom lines by improving land management and maximizing efficiencies (better use of fertilizers, equipment and fuel, for example).

Upfront costs, though, often are an obstacle, though. H2Ohio recognizes that problem by paying farmers (with multi-year contracts) for their conservation commitments.

Likewise, McAleese highlighted the potential for states to broker new partnerships between municipal governments and surrounding agricultural producers.

A city’s wastewater treatment plant is a point source of pollution; farm operations are nonpoint sources. The former must comply with permitting regulations under the U.S. Clean Water Act, and this has traditionally meant spending money on facility improvements. But these dollars might be better spent on addressing nonpoint sources of pollution, by having municipal governments make payments to farmers for new conservation practices.

“This is a bridge between the rural and urban communities that is desperately needed, and it lets people take shared ownership in watersheds,” McAleese said.

If done right, these whole-watershed partnerships offer the opportunity to reduce flood risks, increase recreational opportunities, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats. “Those are things you just don’t get from a simple plant upgrade,” McAleese said.

In Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources already has this kind of adaptive-management program in place. (The state also has a separate, water-quality trading program.) According to McAleese, local initiatives also are underway in Illinois and Iowa.

He said another option for states is to assist agriculture producers themselves in leading local conservation programs.

“A lot of research, and common sense, suggests that farmers learn best from farmers,” McAleese said. “In Wisconsin, the state’s five-year-old Producer-Led Watershed Protection Program provides grants to groups of farmers who work together and lead local efforts to control nonpoint source pollution in a single watershed.”

Overseen by the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection, the program provided a total of $756,000 to 27 different farmer-led groups in 2020. “It’s got a limited bureaucracy, it’s got simple reporting, and it’s flexible and able to adapt to local needs and interests,” McAleese said.

**SHRINKING FARMS’ FOOTPRINTS**

Rod Snyder, president of Field to Market: The Alliance for Shared Agriculture, shared with legislators eight indicators that his organization uses to measure sustainability and conservation in U.S. commodity crop production.

They include comparisons over time of energy, land and water use; impacts on water quality; biodiversity; levels of greenhouse gas emissions; and soil health.

Analyses of farm operations show a “shrinking footprint in terms of environmental impact per unit of production,” he said. That is because of changes in agricultural practices that led to improvements in conservation.

Yet much more is going to be asked of farmers in the future.

“In the next few decades, global population is going to be reaching nearly 10 billion people. We’re going to have the same amount of land and water in 2050 that we have today, and we have to produce a lot more food.”

*Rod Snyder, president, Farm to Market*

| % OF TOTAL ACREAGE IN STATE USED AS CROPLAND (U.S. RANK IN PARENTHESES) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| [State]                       | [Percentage] (Rank) |
| Ohio                          | [Percentage] (Rank) |
| Wisconsin                     | [Percentage] (Rank) |

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

| % OF TOTAL ACREAGE IN STATE USED AS GRASSLAND, PASTURE AND RANGE (U.S. RANK IN PARENTHESES) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| [State]                       | [Percentage] (Rank) |
| Ohio                          | [Percentage] (Rank) |
| Wisconsin                     | [Percentage] (Rank) |

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

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Rod Snyder, president, Farm to Market

Dorothy Pelanda, director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, addresses attendees of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting during a July session on land conservation and sustainability initiatives. South Dakota Sen. Gary Cammack has made these issues the focus of his 2021 MLC Chair’s Initiative. Pelanda discussed her state’s H2Ohio plan, which includes new partnerships between the state Department of Agriculture producers to spread the use of practices that prevent pollution runoff. (photo: Johnny Sundby)

South Dakota Senate Majority Leader Gary Cammack has chosen agriculture conservation as the focus of his Midwestern Legislative Conference Chair’s Initiative for 2021. A series of articles is appearing in StateLine Midwest this year in support of this initiative.
Carolyn McGinn already knew the agriculture side of the rural-urban district that she represents. Along with her husband, Mark, she owns a family farm and raised two sons there. But the longtime legislator also has made it a point to get to know people in the largely Black and Hispanic communities that she represents in Wichita, the largest city in her home state of Kansas. She built relationships of trust. Constituents became friends. And that experience has deeply impacted McGinn, inside and outside her work in the Legislature.

“Individually, I think that is one of the biggest blessings I ever received in my life,” she says. “I have a lot of good friends in those communities, and I’ve learned a great deal from them.”

That relationship-building began decades ago as a county commissioner and then as a state senator. She was first elected to the Legislature in 2004, and along with being a longtime leader on fiscal issues, she has made many rural-urban issues a top priority — landowner rights, water quality and quantity, and land development. “Urban folks and rural folks want the same thing,” she says. “We want clean water and we want to sustain our land for future generations.”

McGinn is now vice chair of The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference, the nonpartisan association of legislators from 11 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces. Next year, as MLC chair, she will welcome those legislators to her home state and community. The MLC Annual Meeting will be held July 10-13 in Wichita.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Sen. McGinn reflected on her legislative career to date and looked ahead to her career. Here are excerpts.

Q: What issues initially led you to run for the Legislature?
A: I wanted local government to be respected. I noticed as a county commissioner that we would take legislation and issues we had vetted and then throw them at the local level to Topeka, and legislators had either a distrust of local government or they thought they had a better idea. I thought they had a better idea. I am someone who believes that local control is best, as it is closest to the people.

Q: How has serving in the Legislature changed or helped you?
A: Starting as a farm wife, to having a family, to winning a county seat that no one thought was possible, I met so many great people in the community — whether they were in the neighborhood or community leaders. It expanded my world. Then I went to being a state senator, and I met so many great people that taught me so many things over the years across the state. That is something I can appreciate — the safety that it provides all our citizens and people who travel through our state. We put more into public transportation and pedestrian/biking. We also believe that what we do here impacts our economy tick. We’re the “air capital of the world.” When Air Force One has a problem, they bring it to Wichita to fix it.

Q: Has what you view as some of today’s important challenges to overcome as a legislator?
A: We have made ourselves into identified groups, rather than individuals who represent different parts of the state and have similar goals. There is a lack of trust and interpersonal conversation, working toward solutions for all. People seem to label you as one thing or another. What they don’t seem to realize, because of the lack of conversation, is you have more things in common than you realize.

Q: What do you view as some of today’s important challenges to overcome as a legislator?
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Q: What has been your most important or satisfying legislative accomplishment?
A: The year COVID hit, I was trusted by legislative leadership to chair the Transportation Task Force and to develop our 10-year plan. We came back for one final week before the Legislature was going to adjourn because of COVID. The bill was overwhelmingly approved and passed. It was an area outside of my normal expertise, but the seed was planted when I was a county commissioner. I had seen how important infrastructure was. I got to watch a transportation plan when I was a county commissioner and early on in my Senate career. But this time I was given the opportunity to actually carry the bill. We are right now seeing the results all over the state. It was something I can appreciate — the safety that it provides all our citizens and people who travel through our state. We put more into public transportation and pedestrian/biking. We also believe that what we do here impacts our economy tick. We’re the “air capital of the world.” When Air Force One has a problem, they bring it to Wichita to fix it.

Q: How has your involvement with CSG and the MLC impacted your legislative service?
A: It certainly helped me grow as an individual and as a public servant. Having an opportunity to network with people from other states, and not only that — Canada — helps me look at issues differently. You can’t learn it all. And sometimes there are things you may have learned 10 or 20 years ago that you get reminded of. Having that conversation and that crew of people to network with I think helps all legislative leaders in our states.

Q: As incoming MLC chair, what are you looking forward to doing in 2022?
A: Hosting all my MLC colleagues in Wichita, the largest city in Kansas. The MLC Annual Meeting hasn’t been held there in 50 years. I’m ready to show off Wichita, and not just the things that make the city beautiful, but what makes our economy tick. We’re the “air capital of the world.” When Air Force One has a problem, they bring it to Wichita to fix it.
FIRST PERSON: STATES CAN HELP SOLVE CASES OF MISSING, MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Law in South Dakota will improve coordination, provide investment resources

EXAMPLES OF MIDWEST’S RESPONSE TO CASES OF MISSING, MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSONS

As part of this year’s omnibus budget bill on public safety (HF 63), the Minnesota Legislature is appropriating $500,000 each of the next two years to establish and maintain an Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. This office will provide assistance to local and tribal law enforcement agencies on active cases, conduct case reviews, and track and collect relevant data.

Nebraska’s LB 154, passed in 2019, requires the State Patrol to study the scope of the problem of missing Native American women and children in that state. Legislators also charged the state agency with forging new partnerships among tribal and non-tribal law enforcement agencies to improve reporting and investigations. The State Patrol’s study found that a disproportionate number of Nebraska’s reported missing persons are Native American. (The share of Native Americans missing is 3.1 times larger than their share of the state’s population).

Two years ago, North Dakota legislators required creation of a centralized, statewide repository to report and track missing persons. One intent of the new law (HB 1313) is to better track and share information on missing indigenous people in the state. The repository includes information on the tribal membership of missing persons.

South Dakota is establishing a new Office of Liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons within the state attorney general’s office as the result of this year’s passage of HB 1199 (see main article). The office will provide assistance to local law enforcement on cases related to missing or murdered indigenous persons, as well as pursue new opportunities for federal funding.

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul has formed a task force of tribal leaders, state legislators and others to help fight the abduction, homicide, violence and trafficking of indigenous women. It is examining the factors that contribute to missing and murdered indigenous women; the role of social service organizations in prevention and response; and the policies need to improve data collection, reporting and investigations.

MISSING AND MURDERED UNIT ESTABLISHED AT FEDERAL LEVEL, WITH OFFICES IN MINNESOTA AND SOUTH DAKOTA

In April, a Missing and Murdered Unit was established within the U.S. Department of Interior to coordinate the work of various federal agencies to solve cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. It will help gather intelligence on active cases, review and prioritize cases, develop plans to guide investigators, and identify outside resources.

Two years ago, under an executive order of President Donald Trump, a Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives was formed. One of its recommendations was to create this new Missing and Murdered Unit. Offices have been (or will be) established in seven locations nationwide, including in Minnesota and South Dakota.

In the U.S. Congress, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021 (HR 1620) calls for increased efforts to solve cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The U.S. House passed HR 1620 in March.
RESOLUTIONS ON FOOD LABELING, U.S.-CANADA BORDER, CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE, FEDERALISM AND TAIWAN ADOPTED BY MIDWEST’S LEGISLATORS

The Midwestern Legislative Conference considers resolutions introduced by individual lawmakers as well as its seven interstate, binational policy committees.

At the MLC Annual Meeting, a bipartisan Resolutions Committee (led this year by Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn, first vice chair of the MLC) reviews and votes on these resolutions. Once passed by this committee, the resolutions are voted on by the full MLC on the final day of the meeting.

Using this process, the MLC adopted five policy resolutions in July at its Annual Meeting. Here is a summary of each of them.

PUSH FOR TRUTH IN FOOD LABELING

Sponsored by the MLC Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, this resolution supports passage by the U.S. Congress of SB 1346, a bill that would require federal enforcement against misbranded milk alternatives. The MLC is also urging state legislators to consider truth-in-food-labeling proposals of their own in order to inform consumers and help the Midwest’s animal-agriculture producers.

INTENSIFY EFFORTS TO CURB CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

This second resolution of the MLC Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee calls on Midwestern states to partner with the federal government on new efforts to stop the spread of chronic wasting disease. It also recommends a ban on the importation of any part of the spinal column of deer carcasses, unless delivered directly to a licensed meat processor or licensed taxidermist.

REOPEN THE U.S.-CANADA BORDER

Legislators called for the U.S.-Canada border to be opened to fully vaccinated individuals. Less than a week after passage of this resolution, Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced plans for such a reopening (starting Aug. 9).

This MLC resolution was introduced by a trio of North Dakota legislators: Reps. Dennis Johnson and David Monson and Sen. Janne Myrdal. They noted in the resolution that “the United States and Canada have enjoyed the most prosperous relationship in the world, amounting to over a trillion dollars in trade and investment annually.”

UPHOLD THE TENETS OF FEDERALISM


It urges federal authorities to respect the constitutional limits on federal power and the appropriate constitutional balance of powers between state and federal authorities.

SUPPORT TRADE, OTHER RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

In this resolution introduced by South Dakota Rep. Ennie Otten, the MLC endorses Taiwan’s efforts to secure the signing of a bilateral trade agreement and encourages Taiwan’s continued participation in international organizations.

NEW SLATE OF LAWMAKERS CHOSEN TO LEAD MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE ON FINAL DAY OF GROUP’S ANNUAL MEETING

Four veteran state legislators from this region have been chosen by their peers to lead the Midwestern Legislative Conference. The election of this new officer team occurred on July 14, the final day of the MLC Annual Meeting in Rapid City, S.D. These legislators will officially begin their new MLC duties later this year.

- Joining the four-member MLC officer team for the first time is Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke. He will be the new second vice chair and is in line to be MLC chair in 2024, the same year his home state hosts the Annual Meeting. Reineke is in his first term in the Ohio Senate and previously served three terms in the state house. He is a 2016 graduate of the MLC’s Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development.

- Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn will be the MLC chair in 2022. She has been a member of the Kansas Legislature since 2005 and is a longtime leader on state finances. Among her duties as MLC chair: leading the work of Kansas in hosting the 2022 MLC Annual Meeting, which will be held July 10-13 in Wichita. McGinn currently is the MLC’s first vice chair.

- The MLC’s current chair is South Dakota Senate Majority Leader Gary Cammack. He will turn over these duties to Sen. McGinn in December and become the MLC’s immediate past chair. A member of the Legislature for nearly a decade, Cammack has been focusing on land conservation policies as his MLC Chair’s Initiative (see cover story) and led South Dakota’s hosting of this year’s Annual Meeting in Rapid City.

- Michigan Sen. John Bizon will be the MLC’s first vice chair in 2022. A 2017 BILLD graduate, Bizon was elected to the state Senate in 2018 after serving four years in the Michigan House. He currently serves as Senate majority whip. The MLC will meet in Michigan in 2023, when Bizon is slated to be chair.

ABOUT THE MLC AND CSG

The MLC is a nonpartisan association of all legislators in 11 states and one Canadian province: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Saskatchewan, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario are affiliate members.

The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staff support to the MLC. CSG is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that champions excellence in state government by sharing innovative solutions to common problems across state borders.

PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO HELP LEGISLATORS FIND SCIENCE-, EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY SOLUTIONS

CSG’s Midwestern Legislative Conference is teaming up with Science is US to offer new programming to the region’s legislators. The goal of this partnership is to help state policymakers utilize science and evidence to address some of the most pressing issues facing communities and states. Science is US is a foundation-supported effort that brings together a diverse group of science, engineering, industry, higher education and labor organizations.

Through this new partnership, legislators will have the chance to participate in a series of workshops dubbed “ELEVATE.” The first event, titled “Growing the Economy,” will be a two-day workshop on Nov. 15-16 in the Twin Cities. Participants will explore issues related to cybersecurity, infrastructure and workforce expectations.

The goal of each ELEVATE workshop will be to provide participants with new tools and strategies to develop innovative, evidence-based approaches to policymaking. For information, contact Mike McCabe, director of the Midwestern Office of The Council State Governments, at mmccabe@csg.org or 630.925.1922.

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 representing 11 states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin) and the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. The provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario are MLC affiliate members.
A bipartisan group of legislators from the Midwest has been selected to take part in a one-of-a-kind leadership training program. The Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development is designed for legislators from this region in their first four years of service. Photos of the state and provincial legislators selected to take part in the 2021 institute can be found below.

This year's program will be held Oct. 1-5 in Minneapolis. It will mark the 26th year in which the Midwestern Legislative Conference has offered leadership training to its members: legislators from 11 member states, one member Canadian province (Saskatchewan) and three Canadian affiliate provinces. The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staff support to the MLC, including its BILLD program.

This year, more than 110 lawmakers applied for a fellowship. Selections were made in June by the BILLD Steering Committee, a bipartisan group of legislators from 11 Midwestern states. Along with overseeing the application process, this MLC committee provides guidance on fundraising and development of the BILLD curriculum. Iowa Sen. Amy Sinclair and Illinois Rep. Anna Moeller serve as committee co-chairs; Michigan Rep. Ann Bollin and Kansas Rep. Jarrod Ousley are the co-vice chairs.
CSG EVENTS

CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference
Virtual Events for Legislators
Visit csgmidwest.org to find dates of upcoming webinars and view recordings of past webinars on public policy, professional development and leadership training.

Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development
October 1-5, 2021 | Minneapolis, Minnesota
Contact: Laura Tomaka ~ ltomaka@csg.org
630.925.1922 | csgmidwest.org

Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission Meeting
October 13-15, 2021 | Detroit, Michigan
Contact: Laura Kliewer ~ lkliewer@csg.org
630.925.1922 | csgmidwest.org

CSG National Conference
December 1-4, 2021 | Santa Fe, New Mexico
Contact: membership@csg.org
859.244.8000 | web.csg.org

Midwestern Legislative Conference
Annual Meeting
July 10-13, 2022 | Wichita, Kansas
Contact: Cindy Andrews ~ candrews@csg.org
630.925.1922 | csgmidwest.org

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