

STATELINE MIDWEST



MIDWEST

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DECADES OF GROUNDWATER DEPLETION MEAN HARD CHOICES AHEAD FOR STATES

During expert-led session at Midwestern Legislative Conference, lawmakers explore policy options to ensure water doesn't run out for future generations of farmers, communities

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

On a recent visit to the western Kansas town of Garden City, Burke Griggs asked local leaders a question that may have first sounded like a joke.

"Where do you plan on moving Garden City in 50 years?" asked Griggs, a leading expert on water law.

He was deadly serious, though, about a problem that the Washburn School of Law professor says a growing number of communities will face in the coming years and decades without shifts in how a state manages, allocates and conserves its resources, particularly groundwater.

"You can't think about a hundred years of urban planning on 40 years of water," he said.

"And it's a problem that's facing the Great Plains as a whole. If we don't start refocusing our water policy around our public, we're going to be in serious trouble."

Kansas Rep. Ron Highland, who joined Griggs as a panelist in July at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, echoed those concerns.

He said one county in his state is on pace to lose its groundwater in as little as seven years. In other areas, estimates show that a continued

SPECIAL EDITION OF STATELINE MIDWEST:

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 binational, nonpartisan association of legislators from the Midwest's U.S. states and Canadian provinces.

This year's event was held July 10-13 in Wichita, Kan. Led by Sen. Carolyn McGinn, chair of the MLC, the Kansas Legislature served as meeting hosts.

CSG Midwest thanks this year's hosts, as well as all meeting participants, speakers and sponsors for making the 76th MLC Annual Meeting a success.

The region's state and provincial legislators will next meet July 9-12, 2023, in Detroit.



depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer means a total loss in 10, 14 or 50 years.

"All of this started with over-allocation [of water resources] back in the days when we didn't know that this was a limited supply," Highland said. "Nobody's to blame. It happened."

"Now we've got to deal with it."

'GENERATIONAL TEST OF OUR DEMOCRACY'

Addressing the problem of limited, and dwindling, groundwater resources was the focus of the

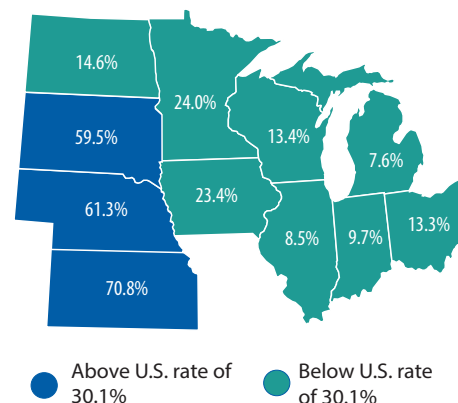
recent MLC session. Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn, who chose water policy to be the subject of her 2022 MLC Chair's Initiative, joined three panelists in leading the discussion.

"It offers a generational test of our democracy," Lucas Bessire said about the challenge of water scarcity.

He grew up in southwest Kansas, on a farm where generations of his family were raised and relied on what seemed like an endless supply of water from underground.

"My great-grandfather was an early pioneer in deep-well irrigation," Bessire said. "He believed the water would never run out, and he pumped

MIDWESTERN STATES' RELIANCE ON GROUNDWATER: % OF TOTAL WITHDRAWALS OF FRESHWATER THAT COME FROM UNDERGROUND SOURCES



* According to the American Geosciences Institute, states with limited rainfall but high water needs, particularly for irrigation, are more reliant on groundwater. The nation's largest aquifer is the Ogallala; it underlies eight states, including Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey (2015 study)



Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn leads a plenary session in July on managing and conserving state and provincial water resources. Water policy is the focus of her 2022 MLC Chair's Initiative. Held during the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, the session included three expert presenters and focused particularly on policies to protect groundwater sources such as the Ogallala Aquifer from depletion. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

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LESSONS FROM THE TOP: FORMER PRESIDENTS GOT BEYOND OLD RIVALRIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST

The phrase “presidents club” usually pops up when two or more ex-presidents are photographed or filmed together, or with whomever the White House’s current tenant happens to be. But “The Presidents Club” is a real, if unofficial, fraternity of sorts that has exercised real influence and power, and one that might offer lessons in bipartisan stability to the nation in a starkly partisan era, journalist and author Nancy Gibbs said in July during a featured presentation at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

One of those lessons: relationships matter, and are, in fact, essential to the health of a democracy.

They are a part of politics that often gets lost in today’s never-ending “Category 5” news cycles, Gibbs said, and when smartphone technology puts a “super-computer in our hands at all times.”

“It’s like we lost the plot line, and everyone is so fixed in our corners and tribes that it’s easier to forget what brings you to a room like this,” Gibbs said to the bipartisan group of legislators who gathered for the MLC meeting.

Living presidents, of course, often were bitter rivals at one time in their political lives. But they also shared a special bond: Members of the club know better than anyone else what the presidency does to its occupant, and they looked past old squabbles to build relationships of trust, said Gibbs, co-author of the bestselling 2012 book “The Presidents Club: Inside the World’s Most Exclusive Fraternity.”

Harry Truman rehabilitated Herbert Hoover’s reputation, and turned to him to modernize the presidency after World War II. John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson both relied on Dwight Eisenhower for advice, just as Bill Clinton turned to Richard Nixon, and George W. Bush counted on the counsel of his father, George H.W. Bush — a unique father-son bond in the modern political era. Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, too, became friends after each had left the Oval Office; Barack Obama and Clinton resolved differences stemming from the 2008 election; Obama and the younger Bush buried the hatchet, too.

“When you see [the presidents] together, what they have in common is so much more powerful than anything that divides them,” Gibbs said — yet another valuable lesson during today’s turbulent political era.

“I don’t think a democracy can function if its citizens don’t trust each other,” Gibbs said. “Helplessness is a dangerous disease in a democracy, incredibly dangerous.”



“What they have in common is so much more powerful than anything that divides them.”

Author Nancy Gibbs on the bond among presidents

CHINNI: DEEP DIVIDES IN THE COUNTRY ARE REAL, AND WILL ONLY CLOSE WITH SOUND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

At the dawn of the internet era, one may have thought that “place” would soon no longer matter.

“You’d be a citizen of the online world,” Dante Chinni said during a July talk to legislators. “You could read whatever newspaper you wanted. You could communicate with your groups of affinity online.”

But as it turns out, in many respects, where a person lives is more relevant today than ever before — including how he or she views government and politics. “What’s happened is we’ve increasingly moved to places of like-minded people, places with people like ourselves,” Chinni said during his keynote presentation at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

The impact of this geographic self-sorting has been compounded by other trends: the rise of social media and niche marketing, and a subsequent big split in how people consume their information. “The net result is we don’t just live in different communities; we live in different realities,” Chinni said.

Through his work as director of the American Communities Project, Chinni uses a mix of data analysis and on-the-ground reporting to explore these differences. For example, he classifies the nation’s 3,106 counties into one of 15 “types.” The political, cultural and socioeconomic disparities among these varying community types are often stark, as Chinni showed by honing in on a single Midwestern state, Kansas, the site of this year’s MLC Annual Meeting.

In Kansas’ 23 “aging farmlands” counties, less than one-quarter of the residents have bachelor’s degrees, and the median household income is \$50,372 a year. Compare that to Kansas’ single “exurb” county (Johnson), where people are more than twice as likely to have a college degree and median household income levels are \$40,000 higher. Kansas also has areas classified as “working class,” “military posts,” “rural middle America,” “Hispanic centers,” “evangelical hubs,” “college towns,” “big cities” and “African American South.”

The same kind of diversity exists across the country.

Some of these U.S. communities have considerable internal wealth, as measured by factors such as asset ownership (dividends, interest and collected rent). In others, community wealth is paltry. Another striking difference is seen in communities’ number of intensive care unit beds: 647 elderly people per ICU bed in “college towns,” compared to 29,076 per ICU bed in “aging farmlands” counties.

Chinni’s message to legislators: The varying needs and realities of these diverse sets of communities need to be taken into account by political leaders. “That is really tough for you making policy in the states, to make sure the policy works in all these different communities. ... It’s going to take a lot of inventiveness,” he said.

Inside state capitols, too, the challenge of building consensus among legislators becomes even greater.

“There is a desire for the country to come back together again, to get everybody back to the same page, and to have a return to normalcy,” Chinni said. “But these differences are really deeply woven into these communities, on an economic level, on a cultural level, and those differences are growing.”

Navigating these divisions requires strong political leadership, he said, and an end to the “all or nothing game” often seen in politics today.



“The net result is that we don’t just live in different communities; we live in different realities.”

Journalist Dante Chinni speaking at the Midwestern Legislative Conference on the causes of the deep political divisions in the United States — and why political leadership is needed to overcome them

HISTORIAN H.W. BRANDS TAKES AUDIENCE BACK TO THE 19TH CENTURY, WITH MORAL QUESTIONS FOR THE AGES

On the surface, John Brown and Abraham Lincoln had little in common beyond their loathing of slavery and births in the 19th century’s opening decade. A closer look reveals they’re more like mirror images of each other, and still pose relevant moral questions for 21st-century Americans to ponder, historian and award-winning author H.W. Brands said in July to lawmakers at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting in Wichita.

“What does it mean to be a good person?” Brands asked. “What does the good man do in the face of evil? What do you do when you see something in your world that isn’t right?”

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 galvanized Brown into direct action against slavery, predicting that “the sins of this country shall not be washed away but by blood.” He famously participated with anti-slavery forces in “Bleeding Kansas” and later led the 1859 raid on Harper’s Ferry. Lincoln, in contrast, fought slavery with ideas and rhetoric, believing it would only be ended via political and constitutional means: Lincoln believed war was wrong; Brown that the war had already begun.

The men’s actions reflect an inherent tension over slavery between the ideas in the Declaration of Independence (“All men are created equal ...”) and the U.S. Constitution (we are a nation of laws...).

Today, Brands said, the college students that he teaches warm up to Brown faster than to Lincoln — largely because, to modern eyes, he had the courage of his convictions and took them to the grave. But that view requires knowledge of how things turned out, Brands added. In the 1850s, in 1860, no one knew.

To those who argue John Brown must have been right because the Civil War broke out in 1861, Brands reminds them of what actually ended slavery. It wasn’t the Civil War, he said, but the 13th Amendment — the kind of political and constitutional remedy ultimately envisioned by Lincoln.



“What does the good man do in the face of evil?”

Historian H.W. Brands, discussing why the contrasting responses to slavery by John Brown and Abraham Lincoln are still important to contemplate today

KANSAS CONSIDERS WIDE-RANGING PROPOSALS TO STOP DEPLETION OF OGALLALA AQUIFER

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

it like there was no tomorrow.”

To this day, Bessire added, some common “myths” persist, standing in the way of the policy adjustments needed to “cut groundwater consumption to sustainable levels.”

Among those myths: Family farmers are responsible for the problem and don’t want to address it, and only continued depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer makes economic sense for these producers.

“Farmers know it’s a problem; they know what to do about it,” said Bessire, author of the book “Running Out: In Search of Water on the High Plains.”

“They also realize individual action is insufficient to [address] the scale of depletion. In other words, depletion cannot be solved by policies that only incentivize voluntary, individual actions by producers.”

According to Bessire, the interests of far-away agribusiness owners and commodity-market investors have held too much sway — at the expense of local farmers, business owners and residents.

“For independent producers, growing irrigated corn in a dry range can

sometimes feel like betting against a stacked deck,” he said.

“Most of our losses are papered over by farm subsidies, crop insurance and bank loans. Such aid can compel farmers to double down on wasteful practices, but even most of these short-term gains don’t stay in our communities.”

A FRAMEWORK FOR RESHAPING STATE WATER POLICY

A restructuring of farm finance was one of several ideas offered by Bessire to end what he called a current “race to the bottom.” He also said states must have policies and water-permitting systems that reflect “the real value of groundwater,” and must ensure that any incentives for reducing water use be tied to “collective, fair and enforceable benchmarks.”

Another priority of Bessire’s: ensuring that local groundwater districts (such as those in place in Kansas) represent all interests in the community, not just a select few water users.

In Kansas, Rep. Highland led the work of a special legislative committee that

took a deep-dive into Kansas’ water challenges and future.

That led to this year’s introduction of HB 2686. It did not pass, but Highland expects many of the proposals to reappear in future sessions — creating a cabinet-level Department of Water and Environment, imposing new or increased fees on water users to raise revenue for water conservation and recovery, requiring groundwater districts to develop plans to reduce groundwater declines by 50 percent, and demanding more reporting by these districts as well as additional state oversight.

“Good bills take time [to pass],” Highland said. “We all know that, and I think we’ve laid the groundwork.”

According to Griggs, groundwater depletion should no longer be thought of as only a “western” or “Great Plains” problem.

It is spreading.

For example, the most recent interstate

disputes have involved Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and Mississippi.

“If you’ve ever been to these regions, you know they’re not lacking for water, but what they’re lacking is regular precipitation,” Griggs said. “And one of the things that groundwater does is allow producers to irrigate when they need to.”

Within a state, he urged lawmakers to craft policies with the view of groundwater, just like surface water, as a public resource.

“Dairies move. Meat plants burn down and move. Farms move,” he said. “But cities can’t move. Neither can rural communities.”

Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn has chosen water policy as the focus of her Midwestern Legislative Conference Chair’s Initiative for 2022. A series of articles is appearing in *Stateline Midwest* this year in support of this initiative. A special session on this topic also was held during this year’s MLC Annual Meeting.

MLC Chair’s Initiative on Water Policy



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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

With state funding, Kansas schools are becoming hub for students to connect to mental health services

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, federal, state and provincial policymakers recognized and began responding to a growing need for mental health services among school-age children.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found in 2019 that persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness among high school students had increased 40 percent since 2009; over that same decade of time, the number of young people who reported planning a suicide in the past year had risen by 44 percent.

Kansas was among the many states that began trying to address this public health problem, one that has only worsened due to the many effects of COVID-19.

In 2018, legislators launched the Mental Health Intervention Team Pilot Program, authorizing \$10 million to deliver mental health services directly to K-12 students in Kansas.

The pilot initiative began in nine school districts, including the state’s largest, Wichita Public Schools. (As of December 2021, 55 districts were participating.)

Three people leading the new effort in Wichita were featured speakers at a July meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Health and Human Services Committee: Stephanie

Anderson, program specialist for school counselors; Holly Yager, program specialist for school psychologists; and Melissa Zieammermann, director of behavior.

Wichita’s program began in 23 school buildings in neighborhoods identified as having the greatest needs; it later expanded to 37 buildings for the 2021-22 school year.

In all, Wichita Public Schools serves 47,334 students, 77 percent of whom come from homes at or below the federal poverty level. Its goals with the new state dollars: provide each school with mental health professionals, and connect students and their families to nearby services and providers.

Students are seeking the newly available help, Zieammerman said.

In 2021-22, the district’s school counselors, psychologists and social workers provided more than 100,000 mental health services.

“Anxiety is number one” among reasons for students seeking the help, Anderson said, adding that de-escalation of anger or grief also ranks high among students’ needs.

Yager said the district has also used a mix of state and federal funding to:

- train teachers and staff to recognize mental health problems among young people and know how to intervene;
- create a district-wide crisis response team;
- begin community outreach efforts to

destigmatize seeking help for mental health; and

- create suicide prevention programs, including a system to monitor the district’s WiFi system for search terms indicating a possible safety concern. In 2021-22, 36,040 such alerts were received by the district’s monitoring team, with 1,054 referred for specific schools for follow-up.

The overall program is showing some success; of 672 students in the program, not one has dropped out of school, Zieammermann said.

Anderson said the district tries to reach students of all ages, but one key to destigmatizing mental health services is connecting with high school students on their preferred social media platforms. They, in turn, can influence their peers or younger siblings more than teachers or even parents.

The impact of athletes and other famous people who talk about mental illness on social media is also helping.

“It’s a slow crawl, but it helps,” Anderson added.

“We really emphasize relationships” to better both students’ mental health and connections to the broader community, Zieammermann added.

Saskatchewan MLA Betty Nippi-Albright said her province has placed



Leaders in Wichita Public Schools share how they’re implementing a new state-funded program in Kansas to help meet the mental health needs of K-12 students. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

school wellness teams in local communities, but a shortage of service providers has hampered plans to expand the program. This problem is particularly acute in First Nations communities, she said, where suicide rates are high.

Manitoba MLA Len Isleifson said the province’s health ministry established a Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness, which released a five-year plan in February to expand wellness and health promotion programs and strengthen the province’s substance use and addiction recovery system.

Michigan Rep. Bronna Kahle and Minnesota Rep. Jennifer Schultz serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Health & Human Services Committee. Kansas Sen. Pat Pettet is the vice chair. Jon Davis serves as CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.

EDUCATION

In Minnesota and elsewhere, high-impact tutoring is making a difference in student achievement

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

For families with the financial means, tutoring often is the intervention of choice to help a child catch up or get ahead in school.

About \$42 billion is spent on it in a single year, Wendy Wallace noted in July as part of a presentation to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee.

“[It’s] more effective than any other kind of academic intervention that researchers have found,” she added, comparing it to practices such as class-size reductions and technology supports. “The effects are shown across grade levels and subject areas, and range from a half a year to more than a year of learning [growth] over one year of academic tutoring.”

Often, though, the child who needs the tutoring the most — one at risk of falling behind and failing academically — does not receive additional supports. The goal of groups such as the National Student Support Accelerator, a project of Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform where

Wallace works: Ensure every student has access to high-quality, high-impact tutoring.

Perhaps more than ever before, Wallace said, states have the opportunity to overcome the obstacles that traditionally have blocked the expansion of tutoring in their K-12 systems. Schools have become more open to scheduling changes, and unprecedented amounts of federal assistance are available (via the American Rescue Plan Act).

In addition, education leaders now have information on the essential elements of a high-impact tutoring program.

In the “No Child Left Behind” era of education policy, many students were offered, and participated in, government-backed tutoring initiatives. The problem was a lack of quality, Wallace said, causing the impact on student achievement to be “close to zero.”

What works? Many of the essential elements can be found in long-running, successful programs run by ServeMinnesota, which oversees all AmeriCorps programs in that state. Through the organization’s early-learning, reading and math corps, tutors are embedded in schools across Minnesota.

People of all ages and backgrounds serve, Lindsay Dolce, chief advancement officer for ServeMinnesota, said to legislators.

“A lot of our tutors have never spent time in school and don’t have an education background, but they’re passionate about serving their community,” she added. “They want to give something back.”

Each tutor receives intensive,

week-long training before ever stepping foot in a classroom. Then, he or she gets ongoing training and feedback, including from a staff person in the school building and from a “coaching specialist” at ServeMinnesota. Tutors also have access to high-quality materials and “scripts” to guide instruction.

Through the Reading Corps, students in kindergarten to third grade get 20 minutes of tutoring every school day. Math Corps provides a total of 90 minutes of tutoring each week to students in grades four through seven.

ServeMinnesota has expanded the reach of these tutoring programs, partnering with more schools in Minnesota while also spreading to states such as Iowa, Michigan, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

North Dakota Sen. Kyle Davison said the program has proven to be a “game changer” in parts of his state.

“We look at the kids on the bubble [of academic success or failure] and try to help them with this program,” he said.

“One of the strengths of AmeriCorps is that these volunteers want to be in your schools, and the effect of a student’s relationship with that adult in that school every day, for 20 minutes [of tutoring], is just incredible.”

In Minnesota, the Legislature has gradually increased appropriations for these tutoring programs. (Most of the funding comes from federal AmeriCorps dollars; private donations help as well.)

Across the country, Wallace said, there has been an uptick in state support for high-quality tutoring — in the form of new grant programs and matching funds for schools.

AVERAGE MONTHS OF ADDITIONAL LEARNING FROM VARIOUS ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS DURING SCHOOL YEAR		
Intervention	Elementary literacy	High school math
Technology support	0.9 months	3.2 months
Reduction of class size	2.1 months	5.2 months
Tutoring	4.6 months	10.0 months
Source: July 2022 presentation by Wendy Wallace to Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee		

In addition, a handful of states now have laws defining “high-impact tutoring” and/or requiring that certain students have access to it.

Other options for states include training tutors that can be deployed in the schools, or bringing more college students into the classroom through new partnerships between K-12 and postsecondary systems.

South Dakota Sen. Jim Bolin and Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee. Tim Anderson is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.



Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig and South Dakota Sen. Jim Bolin lead the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee Meeting, which convened in July in Kansas as part of the MLC Annual Meeting. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

Leadership, including from legislators, is needed to launch mental health courts — and make them work

by Derek Cantù (dcantu@csg.org)

For many justice-involved people struggling with their mental health, incarceration is not conducive for recovery.

"[It] disconnects [offenders] from whatever care they did have in the community, their Medicaid might be terminated, and we see rates of homelessness among people who've been incarcerated are seven times [higher than] the rate of people who have not," Megan Quattlebaum, director of The Council of State Governments Justice Center, said during a session at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

Often at the local level, a lack of resources limits the availability of mental health services in county jails. In state prisons, much of the programming works best for offenders with long sentences.

And the number of people in need of

treatment is notable.

According to a study released in 2021 by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics: 43 percent of state prisoners had some history of a mental health problem.

One option for states: Invest in and expand the reach of mental health courts.

In lieu of incarceration, these dockets allow judges to compel offenders to attend psychiatric therapy, develop behavioral change plans with case workers, or pursue other treatments.

Along with Quattlebaum, four other experts took part in the MLC session's panel discussion, sharing their experiences with mental health alternatives and answering questions from legislators.

For these mental health courts to work, former Ohio Supreme Court justice Evelyn Stratton said, they need a "champion" — whether it be a legislator, a judge, a medical professional or someone else who rallies stakeholders and identifies funding resources.

During her tenure on the bench, Stratton helped create the Ohio Supreme Court's Advisory Committee on Mental Illness & the Courts (now a task force run by the attorney general).

"The [CSG Justice Center] helped us get some grant monies that we [used to get] 10 states to do a statewide supreme court committee to push mental health courts," Stratton told lawmakers.

That was one recurring message to legislators during the session: Outside resources are available to local communities and states looking to expand the reach of criminal justice-based mental health services.

"There are so many free resources and so much free support out there.

You do not have to struggle in the dark," Quattlebaum said. (The CSG Justice Center is among the groups available to help.)

At the federal level, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration administers the GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation. Through these centers, state and community leaders are able to access training, launch peer-support services (matching offenders with former patients), and learn how best to connect individuals with local mental health resources.

"You can gather at any municipality level and meet with other municipalities that are working toward establishing mental health courts, or drug courts, or trauma-informed courts," Kim Nelson, a SAMHSA regional administrator and session panelist, said.

As to the role of state lawmakers in advancing mental health courts, Quattlebaum emphasized the importance of establishing statewide structures — not only securing sufficient appropriations and staff supports, but also establishing standards that are unique from other specialized dockets in a state's court system.

In Georgia, for example, the Council of Accountability Court Judges sets criteria and best practices for the state's mental health court operations.

Each of the panelists also stressed that mental health courts are only one piece of the puzzle, and that lawmakers should also prioritize early-intervention



Nebraska Sen. John McCollister, vice chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, and Kansas Sen. Pat Pettey, vice chair of the MLC Health & Human Services Committee, lead a session on mental health courts at this summer's MLC Annual Meeting. Sponsored by these two committees, the session featured five expert panelists on the potential of these courts in creating paths to recovery, reducing recidivism and improving public safety. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

strategies that occur long before a person goes before a judge. For example:

- investing in co-responder models that pair behavioral health specialists with law enforcement;
- securing operators for the new national 988 suicide and mental health crisis hotline; and
- supporting local intervention groups and mental health community centers such as the Wichita-based, county-run COMCARE program.

North Dakota Rep. Shannon Roers Jones and Illinois Sen. Robert Peters serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee. Nebraska Sen. John McCollister is the vice chair. Derek Cantù serves as CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.

MENTAL HEALTH & CRIMINAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

43%

% OF STATE PRISONERS WITH HISTORY OF A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

63%

% OF STATE PRISONERS WITH HISTORY OF A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM WHO REPORTED RECEIVING TREATMENT SINCE ADMISSION

44%

% OF JAIL INMATES WITH HISTORY OF A MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER

Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016 survey of state prisoners and 2011-2012 survey of jail inmates)

FISCAL AFFAIRS

'Stress tests,' long-term budget forecasting position states to handle ups and downs of economy

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

The best of fiscal times may be the ideal period for budget leaders to prepare for the worst, and smart planning means more than building up state rainy day funds and other reserves.

According to Airlie Loiaconi of the Pew Charitable Trusts, two emerging best practices in states stand out: long-term forecasting and budget "stress testing."

"You already have the building blocks [to implement these practices]; it's just a matter of bringing them all together," Loiaconi said during a presentation in July at a meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Fiscal Affairs Committee.

The session was held a few weeks after many states closed the books on a historically strong fiscal year. But legislators during the MLC session also expressed caution about what may soon lie ahead: a slowdown in consumer spending due to inflation and other factors, and a "fiscal cliff" when the additional federal dollars stop flowing to states.

Among the 50 states, Loiaconi singled out Utah as being the "gold standard" in



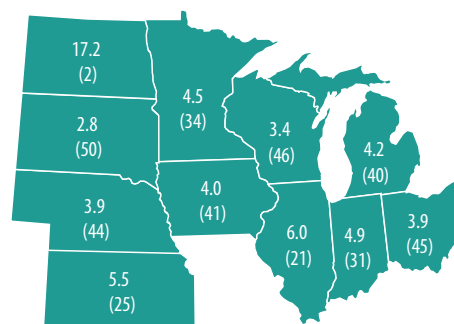
Kansas Rep. Troy Waymaster, co-chair of the MLC Fiscal Affairs Committee, leads a session in July that covered subjects such as budget practices to prepare for recessions and state policies to make the most of new federal infrastructure dollars. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

fiscal planning and analysis. Thanks to a mix of statutorily required policies, she said, budget leaders get the information they need to "think long-term and avoid crisis-driven decisions."

Every three years, for example, the Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst evaluates the budget impacts of a moderate recession, a severely adverse downturn and a protracted slump. A five-year time frame is used.

How much revenue should the state

STATES' TAX REVENUE VOLATILITY SCORES, FY 2001-2020 (U.S. RANK)*



*Volatility scores measure the variation in year-over-year percent changes between fiscal years 2001 and 2020. A low score means that revenue levels were similar from year to year, and a high score indicates that revenue grew or declined more dramatically. The 50 U.S. states had a combined volatility score of 4.99, meaning total tax revenue fluctuated 4.99 percentage points above or below overall growth trends.

Source: The Pew Charitable Trusts, Fiscal Health Project

expect to lose under these scenarios?

How much in contingency funding would be easy to access? How much would be available, but more difficult to access? How does the amount of recession-fueled losses compare to the value of the contingency funds?

These and other questions are

addressed in Utah's budget stress test.

The same office also is directed to produce triennial revenue volatility reports and long-term budget forecasts.

Loiaconi identified several principles for states to follow when implementing these forecasts. They include:

- looking ahead at least three years (Utah's time frame is five years);
- distinguishing, and perhaps defining in statute, one-time vs. ongoing revenue streams;
- establishing a "current services" baseline that shows how much money will be needed to maintain existing programs in the future;
- accounting for any known policy changes, such as tax cuts or new state programs; and
- identifying any looming structural budget deficits, as well as determining the specific causes.

Minnesota Rep. Fue Lee and Kansas Rep. Troy Waymaster serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Fiscal Affairs Committee. Mike McCabe is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.

MIDWEST-CANADA RELATIONS

Legislators learn how states, provinces can help small- and medium-sized businesses enter export markets

by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csg.org)

International trade and supply chains are often considered the domains of federal governments and multinational corporations.

After all, notable trade deals, including the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), were negotiated largely at the national level, and often included input from large corporations in the automobile, technology and pharmaceutical industries.

However, there is space for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) — as well as states and provinces — to get involved.

Policymakers learned how at the 76th

Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, during a session held by the MLC Midwest-Canada Relations Committee and led by two expert speakers: Corinne Pohlmann of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and April Chiang of the Kansas Department of Commerce.

Pohlmann, whose nonprofit, nonpartisan association counts 95,000 small businesses as members, says a boost from export activity would be a much-needed antidote for some firms reeling from the effects of COVID-19.

According to a recent federation survey, 62 percent of small- and medium-sized firms in Canada reported pandemic debt, 78 percent still had not recovered from pandemic-related stress, and 54 percent had less-than-normal revenues.

Exporting is not for all businesses, Pohlmann said, but some that could expand to foreign markets report being hampered by a “lack of resources or expertise” or a “lack of appropriate contacts.”

State and provincial interventions can help overcome these obstacles, including getting SMEs engaged in the vast (and potentially lucrative) Canada-U.S. supply chain.

One example of this kind of assistance: the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership.

Funded by the province but run as a nonprofit with businesses themselves on

the board, the program provides funding to Saskatchewan firms looking to access foreign markets. It also offers education, training, trade missions and customized advice.

Chiang said the Kansas Department of Commerce’s International Division (where she works) has three main export-assistance functions: educate, promote and recognize Kansas enterprises.

The education component is done through webinars, company visits and customized counseling. Promotion may be of most interest to SMEs, and that is done through state grant programs.

The State Trade Expansion Program (funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration, administered by the state Department of Commerce) offers export-focused training, assistance with market entry, and trade missions and shows. Other grants reimburse businesses for participation in trade shows or export-related marketing.

The state also administers a Kansas Governor’s Exporter of the Year Award.

For policymakers on both sides of the border, Pohlmann had these ideas to help open markets for SMEs:

- improve and clarify the rules on labor mobility;
- expand the role of sub-national



Ohio Speaker of the House Robert Cupp, co-chair of the MLC Midwest-Canada Relations Committee, chats with April Chiang of the Kansas Department of Commerce and Corinne Pohlmann of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business during an MLC session on small businesses and exports. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

governments in U.S.-Canada trade and regulatory discussions;

- provide more guidance to SMEs on how “rules of origin” regulations work under the USMCA, and make these rules easier to understand;
- reduce non-tariff administrative burdens; and
- improve how government agencies interact with businesses and distribute information on issues related to international trade.

Ohio Speaker of the House Robert Cupp and Manitoba Minister Kelvin Goertzen serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. Michigan Sen. Jim Stamas is the vice chair. Mitch Arvidson serves as CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.

EXPORT OF GOODS FROM DIFFERENT-SIZED BUSINESSES (2019)		
Business size (# of employees)	% of value of all Canadian exports	% of value of all U.S. exports*
1 to 99	19.5%	11.6%
100 to 499	21.1%	10.0%
500 or more	59.4%	68.4%
* About 10 percent of U.S. exports came from businesses of an unknown size.		
Sources: Statistics Canada and U.S. Census Bureau		

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Promise of high wages, more jobs has states putting more resources into building STEM career pathways

by Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org)

In 2021, 19.1 million Americans worked in fields related to science, technology, engineering and math. This number represents an increase of 10 percent from just two years ago, and STEM employment is projected to grow at twice the rate of jobs in other sectors through 2029.

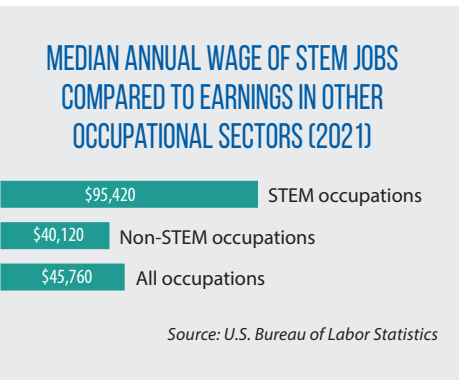
But will there be enough workers?

“States across the region are struggling with a workforce talent demand,” said Jeff Weld, executive director of the Iowa Governor’s STEM Advisory Council.

In a July session co-organized by the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s Economic Development and Education committees, Weld said addressing the need for more STEM workers should be viewed as an economic and national security “imperative.”

He described the necessary state response as “edu-nomics” — educators, business leaders and lawmakers collaborating and building STEM-focused educational pathways that prepare a state’s workforce for success in these high-growth, high-wage jobs.

Led by Weld, Iowa’s STEM Advisory Council is one of 39 such statewide initiatives across the nation; dozens more exist on a regional basis. (Every Midwestern state has a statewide initiative or program dedicated to promoting STEM education and careers.)



By connecting the real world of work with education, STEM programs often focus on experiential learning and workplace experiences. In Iowa, through the advisory council, high school teachers and industry leaders work together on creating a STEM curriculum. In the summer, Iowa teachers are able to participate in STEM-related externships.

Weld also emphasized the importance of raising public awareness. His state has launched high-profile advertising campaigns promoting the potential of STEM careers — including in vital Iowa economic sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing — among young people.

Weld believes the state’s investment in STEM is paying off.

One-fifth of Iowa students now take part in STEM programs; in turn, they demonstrate higher academic performance than their peers. These students also enroll at Iowa’s public

universities at higher rates and are more likely to express an interest in staying in the state, post-graduation. One potential reason why: Their early exposure to promising career opportunities near home.

Nationwide, participation in STEM work can vary considerably by race and ethnicity, and two typically under-represented groups are Black and Hispanic workers.

Introducing black and Hispanic students to STEM opportunities is a goal of the K-12 Initiative, a long-running partnership between the Kansas City (Kansas) school system and the University of Kansas School of Medicine.

With a focus on health and other STEM fields, the K-12 Initiative is a supplemental education program; most activities occur after school, on weekends and during the summer.

Jessica Rodas described the program to legislators as “an early workforce development initiative.” Students often get involved early on (in the middle-school years) and stay with the program through high school. They leave not only ready to pursue STEM degrees of some kind, she said, but to be future leaders.

“They learn about what is happening in their communities — and how they can envision themselves as change makers — along with the learning



Two policy committees of the Midwestern Legislative Conference partnered this summer on a session exploring the value of creating new STEM-related career pathways. Leading this session were Wisconsin Rep. Robert Wittke (left), co-chair of the MLC Economic Development Committee, and Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig, co-chair of the MLC Education Committee. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

competencies [they need to pursue STEM careers],” said Rodas, herself a graduate of the K-12 Initiative and now the program manager.

She pointed out several promising outcomes among participants:

- 91 percent enter college;
- 82 percent pursue a degree in a STEM or health field; and
- compared to peers, they are twice as likely to come back for a second year of college.

Illinois Sen. Linda Holmes and Wisconsin Rep. Robert Wittke serve as co-chairs of the MLC Economic Development Committee. Indiana Rep. Ethan Manning is the vice chair. Laura Tomaka serves as CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Farm economy has outpaced expectations, but high input costs and labor shortages persist as problems

by Carolyn Orr (carolyn@strawridgefarm.us)

With the caveat that “agriculture issues can change quickly,” a leading economist told the Midwest’s legislators in July that conditions in one of the region’s most important industry sectors point to continued growth — both for farmers and the states that rely on the tax revenue.

“Right now the ag economy remains strong, supported by high prices and a robust domestic and international demand for U.S. farm products,” Cortney Cowley, a senior economist for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, said in July during a session led by the Midwestern Legislative Conference Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee.

That is good news for the Midwest, where the health of agriculture affects entire state economies: In 2020, for instance, the industry supported 9 million jobs in this 11-state region, while generating close to \$150 million in tax revenue.

It has been a tumultuous, yet often unexpectedly prosperous period in U.S. agriculture.

At the end of 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many forecasters were predicting the continuation of a recent decline in the agriculture economy in 2020. Then a global pandemic disrupted the entire food production chain.

That year, though, farm prices bounced back quickly for most commodities, and when combined with pandemic relief from the federal government, 2020 turned out to be a strong income year for most agriculture producers.

One outlier has been the cattle

industry. “That sector is still struggling, and cattle prices have been slow to recover,” Cortney said.

When COVID-19 hit, a large portion of the animal processing workforce got sick; at one point, as many as 500,000 cattle were awaiting processing. It was a buyers’ market, and live cattle prices dropped. On the consumer side, meanwhile, a store-level shortage of beef occurred, causing retail prices to skyrocket.

These factors resulted in a large spread between low cattle prices and high prices at the grocery store.

Cowley explained that this gap is continuing because many people who work on the cutting floor at animal processing facilities did not come back to the labor force after leaving due to COVID. Labor shortages on the cutting floor are keeping processing numbers down, she said.

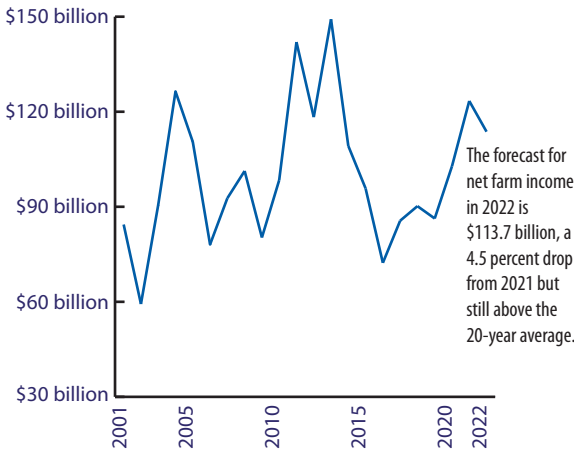
Droughts also have hit many cattle-raising areas, and producers are dealing with high (and rising) input costs, particularly for feed.

As a result, some producers are liquidating herds, and overall, the number of beef cows in the United States has fallen — a drop of 2 percent in July 2022 compared to a year ago. This is the fourth straight year of smaller beef cow numbers, with the biggest decreases in heifer and cow inventories.

Higher cattle prices should be coming soon as a result of this downward trend.

Across the agriculture sector, net farm income, a broad measure of profits, is expected to drop 4.5 percent this year compared to 2021 numbers — down from \$123.4 billion to \$113.7

TRENDS IN U.S. NET FARM INCOME: 2001-2022



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

billion, with this year’s figure still being high relative to most recent years and above the 20-year average.

In part, farmers have been using their increased income to pay off loans, with rates of farm loan delinquencies decreasing and loan repayment rates improving.

According to Cowley, just as supply chains in the farm sector were recovering from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, labor challenges and the weather have impacted agriculture producers this summer.

Because Russia and Ukraine account for a large share of the global production and export of grain and oil, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine caused historical increases in the price of oil and wheat similar to that seen during the Dust Bowl and the 1974 oil embargo. The invasion caused broad disruptions in global commodity markets and large price increases, the latter exacerbated by already low inventories.

Markets have been dropping slowly, Cowley said, but higher commodity prices will continue to be supported by record-high exports through the remainder of the year.

For farmers, one concern continues to be a rapid rise in production costs, along with uncertainty about where input prices are headed. Right now, increases in input costs — particularly

ESTIMATES OF AGRICULTURE’S CONTRIBUTION TO STATE ECONOMIES AND TAX RECEIPTS IN MIDWEST

State	Taxes paid by agriculture sector	# of jobs from agriculture sector
Illinois	\$34.1 billion	1.7 million
Indiana	\$12.3 billion	900,000
Iowa	\$10.3 billion	800,000
Kansas	\$7.8 billion	570,000
Michigan	\$15.0 billion	1.1 million
Minnesota	\$15.4 billion	900,000
Nebraska	\$7.6 billion	500,000
North Dakota	\$3.7 billion	160,000
Ohio	\$23.4 billion	1.5 million
South Dakota	\$1.1 billion	200,000
Wisconsin	\$17.0 billion	1 million

Source: “2022 Feeding the Economy” study (using data from the U.S. Census Bureau)

fertilizers, which are made from fossil fuels — are far outpacing rises in food prices.

Between 2020 and 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that total production expenses will increase by more than 20 percent.

This is leaving many farmers, particularly small and medium-sized producers, to question their ability to just break even this year, despite high commodity prices.

Cowley, in response to questions from legislators about how to help producers, said that states should look to increase access to credit and focus on strategies to ease the labor shortage.

Minnesota Rep. Paul Anderson and Illinois Rep. Norine Hammond serve as co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee. The co-vice chairs are Saskatchewan MLA Steven Bonk and Kansas Sen. Marci Francisco. Carolyn Orr is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the committee.



Three officers of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee preside over a session held in July as part of the MLC Annual Meeting. Pictured (from left to right) are Illinois Rep. Norine Hammond, committee co-chair; Saskatchewan MLA Steven Bonk, committee co-vice chair; and Kansas Sen. Marci Francisco, committee co-vice chair. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

ABOUT THE SEVEN BINATIONAL, NONPARTISAN POLICY COMMITTEES OF THE MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

Each Issue Brief in this edition of *Stateline Midwest* focuses on a topic covered by the Midwestern Legislative Conference policy committees when they met in July in Wichita, Kan. They convene every year as part of the MLC Annual Meeting, and also help develop the business program for this four-day event — the largest annual gathering of state and provincial legislators from the Midwest.

The MLC counts 11 states and the province of Saskatchewan as members, along with Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario as affiliate members.

The seven nonpartisan, binational policy committees of the MLC are composed of legislators from these jurisdictions. Each committee has two co-chairs along with one or two vice chairs. The Midwestern Office of the Council of State Governments provides staff support to these committees on 1) Agriculture & Natural Resources; 2) Criminal Justice & Public Safety; 3) Economic Development; 4) Education; 5) Fiscal Affairs; 6) Health & Human Services; and 7) Midwest-Canada Relations.

The goal of these committees is to provide a forum for legislators to work together, share information and exchange ideas on issues of importance to this region. For more information, and to view presentations from the committees’ July meetings and sessions, visit csgmidwest.org.



Midwestern
Legislative
Conference



PROFILE: MICHIGAN SENATOR ROGER VICTORY

For incoming chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, effective legislating begins by listening to others and providing a voice to those often not heard

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

For someone with agriculture in his bones, perhaps it's fitting that the seeds of Michigan Sen. Roger Victory's political career were planted in his childhood.

"I still remember, at age 4 and 5, sitting in the other room and listening to the neighbors who would come over once or twice a year discussing some of the issues in government pertaining to agriculture," Victory says.

"That was my initial introduction to it, just seeing a real grassroots discussion taking place."

Early on, too, Victory decided to be a farmer in his hometown of Hudsonville, located just west of Grand Rapids and well within range of Chicago's high-wattage AM radio stations — through which he heard news of the Illinois General Assembly.

As a student at Grand Rapids-based Davenport University, he created a business plan for, and soon launched, Victory Farms. Today, the 1,100-acre operation delivers produce across the country.

His evolution from local farmer and businessman to legislator came during the Great Recession — his brother came to work for the farm at that time, while friends and colleagues told him a strong voice for agriculture was needed in Lansing.

"Roger, you need to step up to the plate," they told him.

First winning a House seat in 2012, Victory moved to the Senate six years later and now holds four leadership positions: assistant majority whip, chair of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, and chair of two Appropriations subcommittees (on Agriculture and Rural Development and General Government).

Most recently, legislative colleagues from across the region chose Victory to serve as incoming chair of The Council of State Governments' binational, nonpartisan Midwestern Legislative Conference.

He assumes this regional leadership position later in the year. Part of his duties will be leading Michigan's efforts in hosting next year's MLC Annual Meeting in Detroit (July 9-12).

In a recent interview, Sen. Victory reflected on his time in the Michigan Legislature, as well as his outlook on leadership.

Here are excerpts.

Q What has shaped your views of effective legislative leadership?

A I think it goes back to my first term serving in the House.



BIO-SKETCH: MICHIGAN SEN. ROGER VICTORY

- ✓ first elected to the Michigan House in 2012 and the Michigan Senate in 2018
- ✓ currently serves as Senate assistant majority whip
- ✓ is chair of the Senate Judiciary & Public Safety Committee and the Appropriations subcommittees on Agriculture & Rural Development and General Government
- ✓ owns Victory Farms LLC, a year-round producer of specialty crops, and Victory Sales LLC, a national produce distributor
- ✓ is a graduate of Davenport University and a fourth-generation resident of the western Michigan town of Hudsonville
- ✓ will serve as chair of The Council of State Governments' Midwestern Legislative Conference in 2023

"Align yourself with people who are more intelligent than yourself. The key is always be a listener. Never push anyone away who has a great insight into an issue; bring them to the table."

Coming more from a business and agricultural background, I found myself serving on a committee called Families, Children and Seniors and dealing with a lot of behind-the-scenes issues.

This was not my area of expertise or in my book of knowledge on policy, but the experience really enlightened me.

On that committee, there were a lot of issues we were dealing with — foster care and foster children, for example — where it became clear to me that part of leadership is making sure that when you have an opportunity to bring a voice forward, you bring that voice for those you're representing — and especially for those who may not have a voice.

Make sure their concerns and issues are brought forward.

Q What do you view as your biggest or greatest legislative accomplishment?

A It goes back to giving a voice to those who don't have a voice.

In my days in the House, we had an issue with our unemployment system. It was a software system that was actually accusing people of fraud without having any human element. A computer program would errantly send out fraud accusations. *[Editor's note: A 2016 review found the system wrongly flagged as fraud 93 percent of claims filed between October 2013 and August 2015.]* Working on legislation to fix that —

and sometimes working against your own party — to just do what's right and getting that across the finish line meant a lot. What it's meant for people in Michigan is that they can't be accused of fraud unless there was a human review [of the case].

And then there's the appropriations/ budgetary process that I'm involved in, making sure there's a balanced approach when we distribute dollars so that it's equal throughout the state of Michigan.

Q What has been the biggest surprise to you about being a legislator?

A How quickly things can change. I think coming through COVID is an example of how things and times can change with the environment, and how what was the norm of a year ago is kind of flipped on its end.

One thing you discover is that change is difficult for people. Also, you learn that policy sometimes has a difficult time to move along with that rapid change.

Policy sometimes is like a fine wine; it takes a little time to come to its own life. And when you're going through the legislative process during something like a pandemic, it's a roller-coaster ride.

Q What style of leadership will you bring to CSG's

Midwestern Legislative Conference as its chair?

A I don't really have a definition as to what the style of leadership is. I will just bring the Roger Victory brand that has been successful for me in my days in Lansing, in the House and the Senate, and that has allowed me to take on additional leadership roles.

Part of that is having a good listening ear. Bring your expertise and mine to the table, but also make sure you're a listening person. And, I always have to say, align yourself with people who are more intelligent than yourself. The key is always be a listener. Never push anyone away who has a great insight into an issue, bring them to the table.

Q Do you have a sense yet of what you want to do as MLC chair?

A There are no specific issues that are on the radar, I'm more looking at the 30,000-foot level. I always say, "When you have an opportunity to take on a leadership role, always leave the organization in a better place than you found it." And that's making sure you always add something to it and not take away from it.

So my goal through my term of leadership is that we can grow, learn and experience together for the betterment of the organization and its members.

FIRST PERSON: THE END OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN EARLY GRADES, AND THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

Illinois law results from rethinking the appropriateness of these assessments, opens new options better tied to needs of children



by Illinois Sen. Cristina Pacione-Zayas

If the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that many of the "usual" ways we accomplished things were products of tradition and habit, rather than reason. The surge in work-from-home arrangements and telemedicine are just two areas of life and work that stand out.

One of those areas that faced the most scrutiny was early education: now that young children were expected to stay home, how could educational institutions continue to instruct, assess, monitor progress, and ensure the holistic development of each individual child? This caused many of us to question the way things were.

We found a major area of concern was the use of standardized testing in children prior to third grade. Why would we dedicate public resources to subject our youngest learners to this kind of testing in Illinois if research on child development demonstrates that this testing is not developmentally appropriate?

We found no adequate justifications for the practice.

AGE LIMITS FOR TESTING

Through SB 3986, known as the Too Young to Test Act (signed into law in May), we prohibited the Illinois State Board of Education from funding, developing or requiring school districts to administer

standardized assessments. Specifically targeting standardized testing, this policy blazes a new trail so that Illinois can lead the path toward more developmentally appropriate early-education policy.

Standardized testing before the third grade is not mandated federally, so what were we trying to accomplish?

Scratching past the surface, the reasons were not promising. Could these point-in-time tests truly measure educational attainment, potential and/or growth when child development is so fluid during the early years?

The larger debate about standardized testing is compelling, too, and we should not dismiss the need for further conversation on biases and limitations.

But even setting aside this larger debate, research shows the practice of using standardized tests in the early grades is inappropriate. They don't capture the various and holistic ways children learn, and can thus offer inaccurate readings of a child's actual competencies.

ask ourselves if it was worth creating the pathway for a harmful and inappropriate practice, or if we could take advantage of this moment to push for what the experts are already telling us is the path forward.

One promise with our new approach is to free up time, funds and resources in our K-12 education system. We don't want funds being expended on inappropriate assessments. At the same time, as we make this change in state policy, we need to make sure our schools with populations of limited economic resources don't inadvertently lose any resources from the state.

Our focus should be on making sure that school districts can redirect funds they might have received for standardized assessments. Allow them to pursue authentic and meaningful assessments and strategies that better track and support a child's progress.

We should also expand the scope of that funding to incorporate more than strictly educational assessments.

We should not allow tradition to stand in the way of what the latest research tells us is the path forward.

Research also suggests that these assessments don't help prepare students for the standardized testing they might face in later grades.

Despite these flaws, standardized testing can be further misused for accountability purposes, as a method of measuring teacher performance or school-level progress. This extends the potential harm of our basic mistake — a fundamental misunderstanding of the tools to use in early education, as well as what they say or don't say.

Whatever the goals of standardized testing in later grades (monitoring, accountability, etc.), such testing does not work in the early grades.

Given that, we as legislators needed to

For example, let's look at a child's socio-emotional development, and work to identify his or her particular learning strengths. And perhaps some of this freed-up funding can be used to invest in play-based learning and techniques that are more effective in the early years.

The imperatives are clear, particularly building the social and emotional skills among our children. A generation of young minds has endured significant challenges these past two years with sickness, deaths, etc. Principals have shared that many children are struggling with skills such as conflict mediation, turn taking, and the managing of emotions.

Addressing trauma is necessary for multiple reasons. One of the most

KEY PROVISIONS IN ILLINOIS' TOO YOUNG TO TEST ACT

- The State Board of Education may not require, develop or buy a standardized test for students in pre-kindergarten through second grade.
- The State Board of Education may not fund any standardized assessment of students in pre-kindergarten through second grade other than for diagnostic, screening purposes. Additionally, federally mandated bilingual education assessments are exempt.

compelling of all: The part of the brain that registers stress and trauma is also the part responsible for memory and learning.

NEW SET OF PRIORITIES

When we talk to school officials, their priorities don't include funding for standardized tests. Instead, to improve child outcomes, they want more student supports, wrap-around services, teacher mentoring and professional development.

As the pandemic continues, we must continue to harness this moment to reconsider the tried — but not true — practices that shape education outcomes.

We know the early years are the most vital for the human trajectory. Getting those years right is an imperative. Failure is not an option. We should not allow tradition to stand in the way of what the latest research tells us is the path forward.

Let's push beyond methods that don't work and provide more flexible funding so districts aren't required to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. Let them look into alternative assessment processes and proven support strategies more suitable for their communities and contexts.

This bill is only a first step toward a more equitable system that centers on holistic child development and learning. We must put the habits of old behind and put the needs of young minds first.

Sen. Cristina Pacione-Zayas was first elected to the General Assembly in 2020. She is vice chair of the Illinois Senate's Higher Education Committee and its Subcommittee on Education Appropriations.

TESTING REQUIREMENTS FOR STATES UNDER FEDERAL LAW

- ✓ annual standardized tests in English/language arts and math for students in grades three through eight, and once in high school.
- ✓ annual proficiency tests for learners of English as a second language
- ✓ standardized science tests once in each of these grade spans: grades three to five, grades six to nine, and grades 10 to 12
- ✓ districts must inform parents of opt-out policies and allow them to have their children opt out if state and/or local policies allow it



SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. The opinions expressed on this page do not reflect those of The Council of State Governments or the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Responses to any FirstPerson article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csrg.org.

ILLINOIS SEN. ELGIE SIMS NOMINATED BY LEGISLATIVE PEERS IN MIDWEST TO JOIN CSG NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

Illinois Sen. Elgie Sims, a longtime regional leader in The Council of State Governments, is now in line to become part of a select group of state officials guiding CSG at the national level.

Sims was nominated in July by his peers in the Midwestern Legislative Conference to join CSG's leadership team.

A member of the Illinois General Assembly since 2012, and current chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sims served for four years as an MLC officer, including as the binational, nonpartisan organization's chair in 2019. (CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.) He continues to be an active member of the MLC Executive Committee, and also is a 2014 graduate of its Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, or BILLD and a 2015 graduate of CSG's Toll Fellowship Program.

Later this year, the CSG national Executive Committee will vote on Sims' nomination. If approved, he will become CSG vice chair in 2023, chair-elect in 2024, and chair in 2024.



Illinois Sen. Elgie Sims speaks at this year's MLC Annual Meeting in Kansas. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

CURRENT CSG NATIONAL LEADERS



Among CSG's current six-member leadership team, two are from the Midwest: Wisconsin Sen. Joan Ballweg, past national chair; and Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, past national president. Ballweg and Kelly are pictured above at this summer's Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting in Kansas. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

MIDWEST'S LEGISLATORS OK 4 POLICY RESOLUTIONS AT MLC ANNUAL MEETING

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 Michigan Sen. John Bizon, 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 the following policy resolutions in July at its Annual Meeting:

- call on state, federal, local and tribal governments to develop new action plans that better raise awareness and improve responses to cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people;
- support the protection and return of Indigenous remains and property;
- affirm continued support of the relationship and shared interests between the MLC and Taiwan; and
- support the U.S.-Canada trade relationship.

KANSAS LAWMAKERS WELCOME HUNDREDS OF LEGISLATORS FROM MIDWEST'S STATES, PROVINCES FOR MLC ANNUAL MEETING

Four-day event of Midwestern Legislative Conference was held in July in Wichita

With a goal of fostering collaboration, relationship building and information sharing among the region's state and provincial legislators, the Midwestern Legislative Conference met for four days in July in the state of Kansas' largest city, Wichita.

The event attracted hundreds of legislators from the Midwest.

Led by Sen. Carolyn McGinn, 2022 chair of the MLC, members of the Kansas Legislature served as meeting hosts.

This edition of *Stateline Midwest* features some of what was offered to legislators at this year's Annual Meeting — professional development workshops, legislative roundtable discussions, policy-focused site visits and sessions, and featured presentations from acclaimed U.S. historian H.W. Brands and presidential historian Nancy Gibbs.

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.



South Dakota Sen. Reynold Nesiba (left) and Michigan Sen. Ken Horn take part in a session at the MLC Annual Meeting. (photo: Caleb McGinn)



Illinois Rep. Carol Ammons participates in one of the featured luncheon presentations at this year's MLC Annual Meeting in Wichita. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

THANK YOU TO THE KANSAS HOSTS



Kansas state representatives and senators stand for a photo during the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. They hosted this year's premier gathering of state and provincial legislators from the region. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

SEN. ROGER VICTORY ELECTED INCOMING MLC CHAIR

On the final day of its four-day Annual Meeting, the Midwestern Legislative Conference elected a four-officer team of legislators to lead the binational, nonpartisan organization in 2023.

The team will include a mix of new and returning officers.

Among the new officers: Michigan Sen. Roger Victory, who will be MLC chair and guide the efforts of his home state in hosting next year's MLC Annual Meeting in Detroit (July 9-12).

First elected to the Michigan Senate in 2018, Sen. Victory serves as chair of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee and as assistant majority whip. He was a member of the Michigan House for six years.

Saskatchewan Speaker Randy Weekes is slated to be the MLC's second vice chair in 2023.

The returning officers are Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn, who will move to the position of past chair; and Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke, who will become first vice chair.



Michigan Sen. Roger Victory addresses fellow legislators at this year's MLC Annual Meeting. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

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.

BILLD GRADUATES
HELP LEAD CSG'S
REGIONAL GROUP
OF LEGISLATORS

Along with advancing into key leadership roles in their respective states or provinces, graduates of the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development often take on important roles in the binational, nonpartisan Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC). Among current legislators, for example:

- Four graduates are past chairs of the MLC:
- Wisconsin Rep. **Joan Ballweg**, class of 2007
 - Indiana Sen. **Ed Charbonneau**, class of 2008
 - Michigan Sen. **Ken Horn**, class of 2007
 - Iowa Sen. **Janet Petersen**, class of 2002
 - Illinois Sen. **Elgie Sims**, class of 2014

Two graduates are currently part of the four-officer MLC leadership team:

- Michigan Sen. **John Bizon**, class of 2017
- Ohio Sen. **Bill Reineke**, class of 2016

Eleven graduates are serving as officers of an MLC policy committee:

- South Dakota Sen. **Jim Bolin**, class of 2012
- Saskatchewan MLA **Steven Bonk**, class of 2017
- Ohio Sen. **Hearcel Craig**, class of 2015
- Manitoba MLA **Kelvin Goertzen**, class of 2008
- Minnesota Rep. **Fue Lee**, class of 2019
- Indiana Rep. **Ethan Manning**, class of 2019
- Nebraska Sen. **John McCollister**, class of 2016
- Kansas Sen. **Pat Pettey**, class of 2017
- North Dakota Rep. **Shannon Roers Jones**, class of 2017
- Kansas Rep. **Troy Waymaster**, class of 2015
- Wisconsin Rep. **Robert Wittke**, class of 2019

RECOGNIZING A LONGTIME
BILLD SPONSOR: GENENTECH



Genentech, a sponsor of the BILLD program since 2003, was recognized during a luncheon at the recent Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. Pictured are Kansas Rep. Jarrod Ousley, co-vice chair of the BILLD Steering Committee, and Joe Hrdlicka, senior manager of state government affairs at Genentech. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

BILLD & THE MLC ANNUAL MEETING: A TIME FOR
ALUMS TO MEET, LEADERSHIP PROGRAM'S LEADERS
TO GATHER, AND ALL LEGISLATORS TO ADVANCE SKILLS

SPECIAL RECEPTION HELD FOR ALL BILLD GRADUATES ON FIRST DAY OF MLC MEETING

Every year, a select group of newer state and provincial legislators from the Midwest comes together for five days of intensive leadership training and professional growth.

One of the oft-cited benefits of taking part in this Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development: the chance to meet and become friends with legislative peers from across the Midwest.

This summer in Kansas, as part of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, a special reception was held for all alumni of the MLC's BILLD program. This event allows BILLD Fellows to



reconnect with friends and acquaintances from the program, as well as develop new relationships.

More than 900 legislators have graduated from BILLD since the program's inception in 1995; all are invited to attend this yearly special reception at the MLC Annual Meeting.

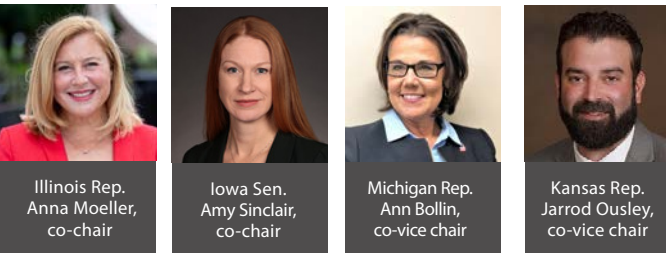
STEERING COMMITTEE FINALIZES PLANS FOR 2022 INSTITUTE, LOOKS AHEAD TO 2023 AND BEYOND

A bipartisan group of legislators from 11 Midwestern states and the Canadian province of Saskatchewan is responsible for guiding the work of the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Committee.

This BILLD Steering Committee met in July during the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

In part, participating committee members helped finalize plans for this year's institute — five days of training in Madison, Wis., with sessions featuring legislative leaders from the Midwest and public policy experts, as well as seminars covering subjects such as media relations and communication, priority management and consensus building.

BILLD STEERING COMMITTEE OFFICERS



The BILLD Steering Committee (led by four committee officers; see pictures above) also discussed future plans for BILLD, including fundraising efforts and the application and selection process that it oversees.

LAWMAKERS EXPLORE PATHS TO CONSENSUS BUILDING, SOUND DECISION-MAKING AND MORE

As part of this July's four-day MLC Annual Meeting, two legislator-focused, interactive professional development workshops were offered to attendees.

Phil Boyle, president and co-founder of Leading and Governing Associates, guided lawmakers through a session on policy decision making — particularly how lawmakers can navigate competing priorities and visions, as well as ethical dilemmas, to reach conclusions in the legislative arena that advance the public good.

Naseem Khuri, a facilitator and consultant who serves on the faculty at The Fletcher School at Tufts University, led attendees in a session that explored strategies of legislative negotiation, influence and conflict management.

These workshops reflect one of the goals of the Midwestern Legislative Conference and its BILLD program: provide opportunities for state and provincial lawmakers to continually advance their legislative leadership skills.



Attendees of this July's Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting take part in an interactive professional development workshop on sound decision-making. It was one of two legislative-focused training sessions held during the meeting. (photo: Caleb McGinn)

BILLD Steering Committee Officers | Co-Chairs: Illinois Rep. Anna Moeller and Iowa Sen. Amy Sinclair | Co-Vice Chairs: Michigan Rep. Ann Bollin and Kansas Rep. Jarrod Ousley

Through the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, or BILLD, CSG Midwest provides annual training on leadership and professional development for newer state and provincial legislators from this region. This page provides information related to the BILLD program, leadership development and legislative leadership. CSG's Midwestern Legislative Conference BILLD Steering Committee — a bipartisan group of state and provincial legislators from the Midwest — oversees the program, including the annual selection of BILLD Fellows.

STATELINE MIDWEST

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS | MIDWESTERN OFFICE

CSG EVENTS

CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference Virtual Events for Legislators

Visit csgmidwest.org and csg.org to find dates of upcoming webinars and view recordings of past webinars on public policy, professional development and leadership training.



MLC

Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus Annual Meeting

September 23-24, 2022 | Chicago, Illinois

Contact: Mike McCabe ~ mmccabe@csg.org
630.925.1922 | greatlakeslegislators.org



GREAT LAKES
GLLC
ST. LAWRENCE
LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

2022 ELEVATE Academy for Legislators

November 10-11, 2022 | Minneapolis, Minnesota

Contact: Laura Tomaka ~ ltomaka@csg.org
630.925.1922 | csgmidwest.org



MLC

Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission Annual Meeting

November 16-18, 2022 | Indianapolis, Indiana

Contact: Laura Kliewer ~ lkliwer@miprc.org
630.925.1922 | miprc.org



CSG National Conference

December 7-10, 2022 | Honolulu, Hawaii

Contact: membership@csg.org
859.244.8000 | web.csg.org



Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting

July 9-12, 2023 | Detroit, Michigan

Contact: Jenny Chidlow ~ jchidlow@csg.org
630.925.1922 | csgmidwest.org



STATELINE MIDWEST

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