



PROFILE: OHIO SENATOR BILL REINEKE, INCOMING CHAIR OF THE MLC

While adapting to constituents' changing needs, state and regional legislative leader hasn't forgotten the workforce issues that initially propelled him to office

by Derek Cantù (dcantu@csq.org)

Seek new state resources and options for communities to address the health and safety concerns that arise when their local landfills become a destination for out-of-state trash.

Serve as the lead sponsor of a new law that requires additional layers of input from local government officials on the placement of wind and solar energy projects.

Today, Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke counts these policy changes as among his biggest legislative accomplishments and priorities. Nearly a decade ago, when he first ran for office, neither of these issues would have made his to-do list.

They rose to the top because of an outlook on legislating that defines his work in the Capitol: Draw inspiration from the people you serve.

"I really enjoy representing my constituents," says Reineke, who represents a district in north-central Ohio. "Rural America's got some unique issues, and I feel there are some local issues that we've been able to address, mostly [involving] rural farmlands and how we grow in our small cities."

That focus on growth is partly what led Reineke to run for office in the first place.

He had been involved in his county's Chamber of Commerce and the local Rotary Club, as well as other local economic development groups — all while serving as a business partner in Reineke Family Dealerships, a three-generation business that has expanded to employ more than 400 people.

At the time, Reineke did not think enough was being done at the state level to help his community, and its businesses and workers, prosper. And there was one area of particular concern: the readiness of young people for success in the workforce.

Since joining the Ohio General Assembly, after his first election win as a write-in candidate in 2014, workforce development has driven Reineke's legislative agenda.

"Complacency is no longer acceptable," he says. "We have to adapt. We're teaching our kids they have to learn technology because things are changing so quickly."

Reineke served three terms in the Ohio House before winning a state Senate seat in 2020. Along the way, he also has been an active member of The Council of State Governments and its bipartisan, binational Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC).

He joined the MLC's officer team a year ago and will be the group's chair in 2024.

Whether it be policy discussions on water quality, education or energy,



BIO-SKETCH: OHIO SEN. BILL REINEKE

- ✓ was first elected to the Ohio House in 2014 and the Senate in 2020
- ✓ serves as chair of the Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee, as vice chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, and as a member of the Governor's Executive Workforce Board
- ✓ is a business partner at Reineke Family Dealerships
- ✓ is a graduate of Morehead State University
- ✓ lives in Tiffin; has two adult daughters
- ✓ is a 2016 graduate of CSG Midwest's Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD)
- ✓ will serve as chair of the CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference in 2024

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Reineke has enjoyed hearing the perspectives offered by lawmakers from across the region, on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border.

"I'm more cognizant of how useful it can be working together with the other 10 states and four provinces [of the MLC]," Reineke says.

Part of his job as MLC chair in 2024 will be to host his legislative colleagues and friends from the region; they will be coming to Columbus on July 21-24 for the MLC's 78th Annual Meeting.

In an interview with CSG Midwest, Reineke discussed his views on leadership, his legislative priorities, and his plans as MLC chair. Here are excerpts.

Q How would you describe your leadership style?

A My personal style is more of a consensus builder. I like to listen. Basically, the projects that I've been involved in [as a legislator] are projects that are the result of constituents coming to me with an issue — most recently dealing with land use and solar and wind projects [SB 52, signed into law last year] and currently the landfill issue [SB 119]. If these were issues you told me eight years ago that I'd be involved in, I'd say, "I'm not sure that's right."

Q What will be the topic of your MLC Chair's Initiative?

A My focus will be on workforce. I have a passion for that because I've lived that world. What's really frustrated me, being involved in politics, is understanding how our kids are falling through the cracks. And if we could provide a better education system for them and better internships and training and workforce development in the education system, we would be much better off. So I will focus on that issue: helping students find their purpose.

Q During a session at this year's MLC meeting, you referenced SB 1, much of which was incorporated into Ohio's new budget. Can you summarize your goals with this law?

A I was surprised to see the high remediation numbers in Ohio, roughly one out of four kids. I say these students are "falling through the cracks" because they are graduating from high school and needing remediation in math and English. At the same time, career-tech education has not been emphasized. It's kind of down at the bottom of the stack and it's stigmatized. ... We're not going to do this anymore because we need the skills and jobs [associated with career and technical education], and our employers are demanding them. ...

With SB 1, we are combining our education and workforce departments together, making our Department of

Education the Department of Education and Workforce.

The idea is that we if have more interactions between education leaders and groups like our governor's task force on workforce, and if we can restructure our Department of Education, we will better understand the in-demand jobs in our state and have a training structure to provide for that.

Q Columbus is hosting Midwest legislators next year for the MLC Annual Meeting; what can they expect to see and learn?

A I'm really excited to have everybody come to Columbus because it's centrally located throughout the state. We are the home of eight U.S. presidents. I think if you look at the history connection that we have, it's just remarkable. I represent President Hayes' and President Harding's homes and libraries in my Senate district, so I've paid particular attention to the presidents and the effect they've had on Ohio.

Also, there is all the innovation that's happening in Ohio — with Intel moving here with its most advanced semiconductor manufacturing facilities in the world, with Ford and GM manufacturing their batteries here, and Honda expanding their testing track program. There's just so much innovation happening, and we'll be excited to showcase it.