

PROFILE: SASKATCHEWAN MINISTER LORI CARR

The first Canadian legislator to serve as CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference chair shares views on leadership, relationship building, and the value of cross-border ties

For Lori Carr, the path to public service was more a runway. At age 12, she joined her local Air Cadet program, where teens get experience in aviation while also learning about leadership and the value of giving back. “The motto of the program is, ‘To Learn, To Serve, and To Advance,’” Carr says.

“Community service was instilled, leadership was taught, effective speaking was mandatory, and, of course, discipline — as well as always striving to be better and do better.”

All good traits and lessons for a future Saskatchewan legislator and provincial minister.

For Carr, though, other public service would come first, including helping lead the Air Cadet program that had meant so much to her as a young adult.

She credits a legislative predecessor for her eventual interest in politics.

“As I watched our local MLA Doreen Eagles, she inspired me in the possibility of holding a position like she had, being an influential leader in the community,” Carr says.

Carr went on to serve for 10 years on the City Council of Estevan, a town in the southern part of Saskatchewan close to the North Dakota border. Next, she won a contested nomination for the Saskatchewan Party and successfully ran in the provincial election of 2016.

She has held numerous leadership positions since that first election to the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. Carr currently is Saskatchewan’s Minister of Rural and Remote Health, Mental Health and Addictions, and Seniors.

In December 2024, she also became the first-ever Canadian chair of The Council of State Governments’ binational Midwestern Legislative Conference. Saskatchewan is a full member of the MLC, which includes all state legislators from the 11-state Midwest. Three Canadian provinces are affiliate members of the MLC.

Carr’s ascension to MLC chair marks another milestone in the work of the MLC in strengthening relations between

the Midwestern states and neighboring provinces.

On July 27-30, she and her colleagues in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly colleagues will host state and provincial legislators in Saskatoon for the 79th Annual Meeting of the MLC.

Q What are some of the commonalities that you see as binding the U.S. states and Canadian provinces of the Midwestern region?

A There are far more things we have in common, whether that be our energy security, our economy or our agriculture industry. The other thing we have in common is our people — our way of living and our values.

I live two kilometers from the U.S.-Canada border, so I have the chance to visit many U.S. communities in North Dakota fairly regularly. Sometimes I feel as though the border is just an arbitrary line, because when I am in the U.S., it feels like I am still at home.

Q What role can state and provincial legislators play in helping strengthen cross-border relations and policies?

A The networking that takes place at events like the MLC Annual Meeting is invaluable. When you have two countries that share a border as we do, and have all the things in common that we do, it is only beneficial for both sides to work together.

A few years ago, we were having trouble with the hours of operation at our border crossings, and because of the relationships that had been developed with our legislators, we were able to make a case as to why the changes were a bad idea.

In turn, we had folks able to talk with decision makers, and some of those changes were reversed. [Editor’s note: Hours of border operations was the subject of a resolution passed by Midwestern legislators at the 2023 MLC Annual Meeting in Detroit.]



BIO-SKETCH: MINISTER LORI CARR

- ✓ first elected to Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in 2016
- ✓ serves as Minister of Rural and Remote Health, Mental Health and Addictions, and Seniors
- ✓ resides in town of Estevan, located close to the Saskatchewan-North Dakota border, with her partner Bart
- ✓ served on Estevan City Council for 10 years
- ✓ raised three children and is a very proud grandmother

Q What future opportunities do you see for binational collaboration among the Midwest’s legislators?

A As MLC Chair, my initiative will be “North American Energy Security: Powering the Future”. We have opportunities in front of us to strengthen continental energy extraction, development and use, and I hope that the relationships in MLC will continue to foster our integrated economies.

Q Relationship building and information sharing are two goals of the MLC. Another is leadership development. What have you learned about effective leadership in the legislative arena?

A First and foremost is listening. We all have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Second, I am a relationship builder. I truly believe that if you develop the right relationships, it will make the job you need to do on behalf of your constituents easier.

I have had people say to me, “You need to be louder. you need to tell this person this. You need to tell this person that.”

Well, I am more of a quiet leader, working behind the scenes, building relationship and getting stuff done. There is time to be very vocal, and I

have no problem doing that when it is necessary, but the majority of the time, it usually just takes reasonable conversations, of course backed up by sensible rationale.

I have also learned that you don’t have to do it all yourself. You have a team that is there to work with you.

Q Are there examples of how you’ve used some of those leadership attributes to help your community or advance policy?

A I would point to two. First, the community I live in has been advocating for a new nursing home for several years, long before I became MLA for Estevan. We were able to successfully prove the need for it. We advocated and got approval on a new nursing home. Needless to say, this is a big win for our community, as you can imagine there are several demands for public dollars in this space.

Second, when I was Minister of Social Services, I had the opportunity to sign an agreement that had been years in the making between the Federal Government, the Cowessess First Nation and our government. The agreement was the first of its kind in Canada. It has allowed the Cowessess First Nation to start setting up resources and its own child welfare system — to start to facilitate taking over children in care who come from their nation.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: TOP MEETING OF MIDWEST’S LEGISLATORS IS COMING TO SASKATCHEWAN’S LARGEST CITY IN JULY

In 2025, for the fourth time in the 79-year history of The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, a Canadian province will serve as meeting host. The meeting will be held July 27-30 in Saskatchewan’s largest city, Saskatoon. Situated on the South Saskatchewan River, with 10 bridges that span the waterway and link the city’s vibrant neighborhoods, Saskatoon is known as the “Paris of the Prairies.”

As in past years, the family-friendly MLC meeting will give legislative attendees and their guests of all ages ample opportunity to explore the host city. The meeting also will again deliver a mix of policy sessions, professional development workshops, site visits and special events designed by and for state and provincial legislators from the Midwest — all in a welcoming, nonpartisan environment.

“MLC 2025 will offer dynamic conversations, different perspectives, and, hopefully, new connections for everyone who travels to Saskatchewan,” says Saskatchewan Minister Lori Carr, the first-ever Canadian legislator to be MLC chair, who will serve as the meeting host along with her colleagues in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

Meeting registration will open in early 2025. All legislators from 11 Midwestern states are members of the MLC. Saskatchewan is a full MLC member, and the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario are affiliate members. Saskatchewan last hosted the MLC Annual Meeting in 2005. The meeting also has been held in Manitoba and Ontario.

