Common to the core

State policymakers consider joining effort to adopt uniform educational standards

by Jennifer Ginn (gjinn@csg.org)

The phrase "Common Core State Standards Initiative" might not exactly roll off the tongue, but what it represents could mean a major change to how education is delivered in states across the nation.

Right now, each state has its own set of K-12 education standards, which generally are adopted by state boards of education. The standards shape what students should know and be able to do after completing each grade. Those academic standards are used to develop a curriculum, adopt textbooks, make lesson plans and create state assessments.

Because each state has its own set of standards, some of which vary drastically, complications can arise for students and educators. When students transfer from one state to another, the new school must figure out which classes it can accept and which ones the student has to retake because they don’t cover concepts required in the new state.

Colleges, universities and even employers also can’t be sure a high school graduate from Illinois, for example, will have the same skills as one from Kansas.

Common core initiative

That’s where the Common Core State Standards Initiative comes into play. Led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, groups of experts from across the country have come together over the past two years to come up with a common set of standards in math and English Language Arts. The next subjects to be tackled will be social studies and science.

Although federal common core standards were attempted in the 1990s and failed, this project is being led by the states. So far, 48 states and two territories have joined in on the effort.

“We really believe that setting these standards is the job of the state,” says Chris Minnich, director of standards and assessment at CCSSO. “Right now … every state has different standards. What we’re trying to do is get states to agree to a set of standards. … We’re not talking about how these standards should be taught. We’re talking about what a student should be able to do when they leave the educational system.”

Minnich adds that there has been quite a lot of involvement on the part of the states. Once the standards were written by a work group, a feedback panel reviewed them and provided input.

“The last set of feedback, I think, was over 300 pages on the part of the states. The standards were written by a work group, a feedback panel reviewed them and provided input.

“We really believe that setting these standards is the job of the state,” says Chris Minnich, director of standards and assessment at CCSSO. “Right now … every state has different standards. What we’re trying to do is get states to agree to a set of standards. … We’re not talking about how these standards should be taught. We’re talking about what a student should be able to do when they leave the educational system.”

Chris Minnich
Council of Chief State School Officers

After all feedback has been considered, the standards will go to a final validation committee comprised of national experts selected by governors and school chiefs. The panel will review the process and the standards to ensure they are research- and evidence-based.

The final version of the new English Language Arts and math standards should be ready in early March, Minnich says. The goal is to have states adopt the standards by the end of June, with three years given to implement them.

“It’s up to the states to make the voluntary decision to adopt [the common core standards],” says Ilene Berman, program director in the education division at the NGCA for Best Practices.

“There are certainly some states where the time line for the adoption process is shorter than others. I think there will be a core group of states that comes on initially; other states may need more time.
Great Lakes

Asian carp fight continues, in the water and in the courts

The new year got off to an unsuccessful start for state and federal officials working feverishly to protect the Great Lakes from an invasion of Asian carp.

In January, University of Notre Dame researchers confirmed the presence of Asian carp DNA in Lake Michigan’s Calumet Harbor.

Though no actual Asian carp were found in searches conducted immediately after the discovery, the positive DNA result more than likely means the silver carp has reached the Great Lakes, says David Lodge, director of the University of Notre Dame Center for Aquatic Conservation.

But he adds that the fight to save the lakes from this non-native fish species is far from lost. The key isn’t whether one fish enters the system, but whether enough penetrate it to survive and spread.

“It comes down to a numbers game,” Lodge says. “We don’t know what that number is. But we do know that the more fish there are, the more likely a self-sustaining population will develop.”

Eradicating an established population of Asian carp in the Great Lakes would be an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task.

It has been hard enough trying to block the fish from entering Lake Michigan via the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, where Lodge says there are “gazillions of bighead and silver carp below the electric barriers” constructed to keep Asian carp out.

Some of the strategies employed by the multi-agency Asian Carp Rapid Response Work Group have included: enhancements to the existing barriers, application of a fish poison in parts of the canal, and the use of “electrofishing” and netting. The group said in January that it was considering other options as well, such as constructing an additional barrier and changing the operation of the shipping canal’s locks.

Led by the state of Michigan, several Great Lakes states asked the U.S. Supreme Court to close the shipping canal’s locks. Their request for a preliminary injunction was denied in January. Illinois officials opposed a closing of the locks, saying such a move would cause widespread flooding, shut down the shipping industry and not guarantee the carp would be stopped.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes has called for the ecological separation of the Mississippi and Great Lakes basins (the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal connects them).

What would be the consequences of an Asian carp invasion?

No one knows for sure, Lodge says. But based on what researchers have been able to observe about the species’ impact on other systems, including the Mississippi River basin, he believes the spread of Asian carp would be “a very bad thing” for the Great Lakes. Large in size, the carp are voracious eaters that could eliminate food supplies for native fish, thus harming the Great Lakes ecosystem and its $7 billion fishing industry.

By the numbers: The Midwest’s manufacturing base, carbon footprint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% of jobs in manufacturing sector</th>
<th>Population/CO₂ emissions as % of U.S. total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6.2%/4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>2.1%/4.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>3.0%/1.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>0.9%/1.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>3.4%/3.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1.7%/1.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>0.6%/0.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>0.2%/0.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>3.8%/4.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>0.3%/0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>3.8%/1.9%</td>
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A central reason why is concern about the impact on the U.S. economy. The Midwest would likely be affected more than other regions because of its reliance on coal for electric power and the manufacturing sector for jobs. According to American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity data, coal accounts for 68.6 percent of the electricity used in this region, compared to 39.2 percent in other parts of the U.S. Manufacturing accounts for 10.7 percent of the jobs in the Midwest vs. 8.3 percent in the rest of the country.

If carbon dioxide emissions are regulated or taxed, manufacturers would feel the pinch in one of two ways: a new cost on the emissions they produce, or higher electricity rates passed on to them by power companies. The fact that much of this sector must compete globally only exacerbates the problem of higher energy costs.

In a June 2009 report, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (www.thechicagocouncil.org) recognizes these energy challenges, but also urges the Midwest to embrace them: “Few regions are better positioned to reap benefits from a massive, new national-level effort.” The report recommends policies to improve energy efficiency, promote research and innovation at the region’s universities, and develop a skilled and trained workforce.

Coal, manufacturing put region at center of U.S. energy debate

In early December 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released a finding showing that carbon dioxide as well as five other greenhouse gases, or GHGs, threaten the public health and welfare of the American people.

In recent years, the Midwestern Governors Association has been working to address a number of issues related to energy and the environment, including the advancement of renewable energy and carbon-capture-and-storage technologies.

The EPA’s endangerment finding does not impose any GHG reduction rules, but it is a necessary bureaucratic step for any future regulation.

In September 2009, the EPA and U.S. Department of Transportation proposed a rule that would limit, by 2016, the average emission level of new cars and light-duty trucks to 250 grams of carbon dioxide per mile. That would translate to 35.5 miles per gallon if the new requirement were in place.

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Agriculture & Natural Resources

Interest in sustainable agriculture puts pressure on states, producers

While there has been a lot of talk recently about sustainability in food production, it is often linked to terms such as “organic” and “local.” But where does—or can—modern, conventional agriculture fit into the discussion? The answer is important for the Midwest because more and more global buyers of the region’s commodities want to know how the products they purchase are grown. For example, what is a product’s “carbon footprint”? According to Cole Gustafson, a North Dakota State University economist, Japanese grain buyers are now asking him about how grains from this region are produced and about the amount of greenhouse gases released during the process. Some food labels have even begun to list a product’s carbon footprint. For instance, the Japanese beer Sapporo notes the amount of carbon emissions released in its production. Concern about climate change is just one of many factors driving consumer interest in sustainable agriculture practices. Whatever the reasons, Midwestern states and farmers have a stake in meeting this demand. Last year, North Dakota legislators responded by overwhelmingly passing SB 2438, which creates the “Sustainably Grown in North Dakota” logo and promotion program. The measure creates an advisory committee to examine production practices and advise the state’s agriculture commissioner, who will then develop a program promoting agricultural commodities designated as “sustainably grown.” Under the bill, a crop can meet this designation if research-based practices are used in its production and result in:
• increased efficiencies in soil and nutrient preservation,
• a decreased reliance on tillage and other soil-depleting practices,
• increased efficiencies in the use of water and “other necessary and measurable agricultural inputs,”
• increased yield efficiencies, and
• a greater economic benefit to producers.
The Organic & Non-GMO Report, a monthly newsletter that focuses on issues related to U.S. agriculture and genetically modified foods, has criticized North Dakota lawmakers for lowering “the bar considerably” on what can be defined as sustainable agriculture. But North Dakota Sen. Terry Wanzek says “food producers facing the challenge of producing safe, affordable food may need more tools than organic production provides.”

“Food producers facing the challenge of producing safe, affordable food may need more tools than organic production provides.”
North Dakota Sen. Terry Wanzek

Measuring sustainability of U.S. farms

Recognizing the dual pressures on farmers to improve environmental stewardship and increase production (total global food requirements are expected to increase 100 percent by 2050), while the amount of land and water available for production is likely to decrease, several organizations have developed ways for producers to measure the sustainability of their crop and livestock operations. One example is the Fieldprint Calculator, a free online tool developed by the Keystone Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture. The calculator asks a farmer about the use of natural resources (such as land, topsoil and water) and key inputs (such as energy, plant nutrients and crop-protection products). It then computes the “sustainability performance” of the operation. In turn, farmers can use these measurements to change how their operations are managed or to determine which new technologies to adopt. The Keystone Alliance has also conducted research on trends in overall U.S. agriculture, evaluating changes in the production of a particular crop over time and comparing the results to changes in the land, energy and water needed to produce it (soil loss is also measured). For example, the alliance found that between 1987 and 2007, greenhouse gas emissions related to the production of corn increased 8 percent. However, per-bushel emissions actually fell 30 percent over that time period.

Some researchers at Washington State and Cornell universities, meanwhile, have focused on trends in animal agriculture, including the dairy industry. They found that per-cow emissions of CO2 have more than doubled over the last 65 years (due to advances in breeding). But in terms of resource use and waste output per unit of milk, the dairy industry made major advances between 1944 and 2007: the number of animals needed fell by 77 percent, land use by 90 percent and manure output by 76 percent. The milk industry’s carbon footprint, per unit of milk, decreased by 41 percent. These findings point to the role that research, technological improvements and management practices can play in improving efficiencies in modern, conventional agriculture—regardless of how “sustainable agriculture” is defined, or who defines it.

Economic Development

Report shows Midwest behind on key economic-growth indicators

Before acting to improve a state’s economic competitiveness, policymakers first need to know its strengths and vulnerabilities—as well as which matter most.

Arming state leaders with this information is the goal of the first phase of the Resurgent Midwest, Insurgent Growth Initiative, a multi-year project being undertaken by the Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments and GrowthEconomics Inc.

The first report of the initiative will be released later this year. It will include data and analysis for each Midwestern state as well as the region as a whole. In January, members of an Indiana House committee got a preview of the report’s findings. At the legislative briefing, the project’s principal researcher, Graham Toft, detailed what various economic measurements and benchmarks tell lawmakers about the health and future of Indiana’s economy.

Many of the findings mirror the economic challenges and opportunities for states across the Midwest. In particular, most states in the region (with the exceptions of Illinois and Minnesota) fall behind the rest of the country in two key areas: the high-tech economy and entrepreneurial activity. Poor access to capital and labor-force challenges are among the factors inhibiting more-robust growth in these areas and in the overall economy, Toft told lawmakers. For example, though Indiana performs above average in areas such as post-secondary participation and completion rates, the skill level of the state’s workforce is not what it needs to be. One of Indiana’s core challenges, he said, is to develop what he calls “an innovation workforce.” But at a time when Indiana’s need for more skilled, highly trained workers is growing, its labor force has been shrinking: the number of people in jobs or actively seeking employment is lower than it was in 1999. “Nearly 140,000 people have decided not to bother looking for work,” said Toft, adding that the state has also experienced growth in the number of underemployed workers—those working part-time who would like full-time jobs. “[You] have a freed-up capital and human asset and should take advantage of that,” he said.

For information on the Resurgent Midwest, Insurgent Growth Initiative and its forthcoming report, contact Laura Tomaka at ltomaka@csg.org. Laura is the CSG Midwest staff liaison for the Midwestern Legislative Conference Economic Development Committee. The committee’s co-chairs are Ohio Rep. Ted Celeste and South Dakota Rep. Mike Veihle.

Status of state economies in Midwest

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New Census, same result: Midwest on losing end

I n 2000, no state had a lower U.S. Census undercount rate than Minnesota.

Ten years later, a repeat of that high level of performance is needed to save the state from losing a vote in the U.S. electoral college and a seat in the U.S. Congress.

“We need to make sure we don’t miss anybody,” Minnesota demographer Tom Gillaspy says about limiting the “undercount,” the number of people in a state’s population not counted in the U.S. Census. “There is such a low margin of error.”

Current estimates show Minnesota losing one of its eight congressional seats. In all, the Midwest is projected to have six fewer congressional seats — the continuation of a century-long trend that has seen this region lose 36 seats in the 435-member U.S. House.

The Midwest’s loss of at least another five seats seems assured: two in Ohio, and one each in Illinois, Iowa and Michigan. But Gillaspy says Minnesota’s chances “are improving every day.”

One factor favoring Minnesota is the recent decline in interstate migration that coincided with a collapse of the U.S. housing market. (Before the housing crisis, during the first part of this decade, the Midwest lost nearly 645,000 people with a collapse of the U.S. housing market. (Before publication of this month’s StateLine Midwest.)

Quinn offered no specifics, but said the state needs to raise more revenue and change “an unfair tax system” that is “taxing poor people into further poverty.” Last year, he pushed a plan that would have raised corporate and businesses taxes while also raising the rate of the state’s constitutionally mandated flat income tax from 3 percent to 4.5 percent.

In Kansas, Parkinson proposed raising the state’s per-pack cigarette tax from 79 cents to the national average of $1.34. He also urged legislators to enact a temporary three-year increase in the state sales tax, from 5.3 percent to 6.3 percent. He said relying on cuts alone to erase the state’s budget deficit (it is $400 million for fiscal year 2011) “would do years of damage to what we have built.”

Government reform, efficiency

In discussing his state’s budget woes, Iowa Democratic Gov. Chet Culver asked lawmakers to move forward with the recommendations of a 2009 report on government efficiency, which he said “will allow us to save more than $200 million next year and nearly a billion dollars over the next five years.”

Ideas include:
• offering early retirement and four-day workweeks to some state employees;
• reducing Iowa’s fleet of vehicles;
• eliminating unnecessary information technology services; and
• restructing the purchasing policies of different state agencies and health care programs.

In his State of the State address, Nebraska Republican Gov. David Heineman said new technologies, if better and more widely used, held the promise of making state government leaner and more effective.

“IT would require a round of cuts that would do years of damage to what we’ve built.”

Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson on balancing the budget without a tax increase or other mechanisms to raise additional revenue

Governors lay out plans for 2010

In the eight January State of the State addresses that kicked off legislative sessions in the Midwest, the region’s governors steered clear of large-scale or high-cost new initiatives, but they did unveil plans designed to make government run more efficiently, spur economic growth and reform K-12 education.

The modest agendas at least in part reflect the fiscal crisis in state government.

There is little or no money for new programs in most states, and getting budgets out of the red will consume much of the work of legislators in 2010.

It does not appear that broad-based tax increases will be used in many, if any, Midwestern states as a budget-balancing strategy.

Only two governors — Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn and Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson — mentioned tax hikes in their January speeches. (Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty were scheduled to give their addresses in February; after publication of this month’s StateLine Midwest.)

“IT is a state committed to protecting taxpayers, and limiting government to the role of the people’s servant, has no business maintaining more elected politicians than states twice our size.”

Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels

Finding cost savings is at a premium this year because of a historic collapse in revenues, and states’ fortunes will turn around only if their economies rebound.

With that in mind, Ohio Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland unveiled a series of economic and workforce development initiatives.

• His $40 million Energy Gateway Fund will provide capital to new or growing advanced-energy companies (fuel cell, solar, wind and energy storage). Money for the fund will come from state ($10 million) and federal economic stimulus funds ($30 million). Projects will only be eligible for the Gateway Fund if they receive a dollar-for-dollar match of private funds.
• In response to concerns about small businesses’ lack of access to capital, Ohio is working with lenders to create a business-lending clearinghouse. The goal, Strickland said, is to establish a “working capital jobs fund” for small businesses.
• He also wants to create a new “manufacturing certificate” that workers in the state could obtain and use to show prospective employers their full range of job skills and experience.

Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle focused much of his speech on the economy as well.

He has asked the legislature to provide millions of dollars in tax credits for angel and venture-capital investors, and proposed creation of a new $160 million revolving loan fund for manufacturers to reduce their energy costs.

K-12 education changes proposed

Doyle and other governors also touched on K-12 education. Noting the continued academic failure of Wisconsin’s largest school district, Doyle is pushing to give the mayor control over the system in order to improve accountability.

In Indiana, Daniels unveiled a plan to address what he called “the greatest cause of student failure: the inability of so many of our children to read proficiently.” Under SB 258, any student who fails the reading component of the statewide standardized test for third-graders would be held back; he or she would receive additional academic help from the state and local school district.
According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 10 of the 11 Midwestern states require some form of high school physical education. In Nebraska, only local school districts can mandate P.E. requirements for high school students. That was also the case in North Dakota until last year, when the legislature passed HB 1400, which now requires students to complete one unit of P.E. or 0.5 units each of P.E. and health education.


In the Midwest, Wisconsin students must complete 1.5 credits for graduation. In Indiana, 2 credits are required. Illinois, meanwhile, is one of only two states in the nation that requires daily P.E. classes for each year of high school and 0.5 units of health education.

Minnesota law requires only that P.E. classes be offered; local districts are left to decide how much is required of students.

About four years ago, Minnesota became one of the first states in the nation to offer gym classes online. Students who take these classes must monitor and report their activities in a log signed by their parents. The students also have several in-person meetings with a teacher during the semester.

In a July 2007 position paper on the subject, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education notes several potential advantages and challenges with online P.E. classes. Challenges include the difficulty in monitoring a student’s physical activity or being able to provide immediate feedback.

One of the advantages is that an online P.E. class can free up students to take other courses during the school day. Another benefit is to help school districts that do not have a certified P.E. teacher or that lack the facilities and equipment.

Over the last several years, a mix of budget constraints and the pressure to meet student achievement goals in core subject areas has forced states and local school districts to face tough choices about P.E. classes. In some cases, this has led school leaders to choose more classroom time at the expense of time spent exercising, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Active Living Research program.

The foundation notes, however, that “regular exercise may improve students’ concentration and cognitive functioning.” In addition, some research suggests that the academic performance of fit and active students tends to be stronger than their peers.

Proponents of strong P.E. requirements and standards also point to concerns about the nation’s obesity epidemic. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has doubled in the last 20 years. One in three teens and younger children are obese or overweight, with one cause of this trend being the lack of daily physical activity. The U.S. surgeon general suggests that children exercise 60 minutes on most days of the week.

According to the CDC study “Physical Education and Physical Activity: Results from the School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006,” 21 percent of U.S. high schools and less than 4 percent of elementary schools provide daily P.E. classes.

Laws in seven Midwestern states that prohibit corporations from spending money to advocate for or against political candidates are no longer enforceable as the result of a January decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, campaign finance experts say.

According to the National Institute on Money in State Politics, seven of the 24 U.S. states with such bans on the books are from this region: Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

In all but Iowa and Minnesota, these prohibitions on “independent expenditures” (the term given to money spent on a campaign, but not in coordination with a particular candidate) extend to unions as well.

At issue in the Supreme Court case (Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission) was the constitutionality of a federal law placing restrictions on independent expenditures. The justices ruled that the law was a violation of the First Amendment. As a result, some state campaign-finance regulations will be affected as well.

Tara Malloy, associate legal counsel for The Campaign Legal Center, says there are several ways states might respond.

- Legislatures could strike down or significantly change parts of the campaign-finance law banning independent expenditures.
- State attorneys general or election officials may simply not enforce the independent-expenditure ban because it conflicts with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling.
- States might still try to enforce the bans, but litigation would inevitably follow.

However states proceed, Malloy believes they will all end up in the same place: without a ban or limits on spending in political campaigns by corporations or unions.

Legislative responses to this change could include new types of campaign-finance restrictions, a renewed push for the public financing of campaigns and stronger disclosure rules, The New York Times reported in January.

The court ruling does uphold state and federal laws that prohibit corporations from giving money directly to political candidates. In the Midwest, the same seven states that ban “independent expenditures” by corporations also prohibit them from contributing to candidates; the other four states in the region limit the amount of contributions that can be made. (In most states, unions must also abide by direct-contribution bans or limits.)

An analysis done by Denise Roth Barber, research director at the National Institute on Money in State Politics, shows the impact that state campaign-finance laws have on spending patterns in political races.

- In the 22 states that have an outright ban on corporations giving money directly to candidates, individuals provide 48 percent of the money raised for state campaigns, while non-individual donors (corporations, unions and other groups) account for 23 percent of the total.
- In contrast, in the six states that allow unlimited corporate money to go directly to candidates, non-individual donors account for 41 percent of the money raised, while individuals contribute 23 percent. (Illinois is included among the six states because its limits on direct contributions were enacted last year and have not yet taken effect.)

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Due to poor disclosure requirement laws, Roth Barber says, it will be difficult to quantify changes in spending patterns that result from an overturning of state bans on independent expenditures. But this lifting of restrictions on corporations and unions is sure to increase the amount of money spent on advertising and other political activities, she adds.

**Q U E S T I O N  O F  T H E  M O N T H**

**What physical education requirements do states in the Midwest set for their high school students?**

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- In contrast, in the six states that allow unlimited corporate money to go directly to candidates, non-individual donors account for 41 percent of the money raised, while individuals contribute 23 percent. (Illinois is included among the six states because its limits on direct contributions were enacted last year and have not yet taken effect.)

- In the 22 states that allow limited corporate contributions to candidates, non-individual donors account for 38 percent of the money raised in state elections, while individuals provide 31 percent.

Due to poor disclosure requirement laws, Roth Barber says, it will be difficult to quantify changes in spending patterns that result from an overturning of state bans on independent expenditures. But this lifting of restrictions on corporations and unions is sure to increase the amount of money spent on advertising and other political activities, she adds.
Policymakers in Midwest weigh pros, cons of common core initiative

“The Common Core standards will be very consistent among states. We will be able to say we know that students in Kentucky are learning the same thing as students in Connecticut.”

Lisa Gross
Kentucky Department of Education

Legislators eye standards cautiously

North Dakota Lt. Gov. Jack Dalrymple, who chairs the North Dakota Commission on Education Improvement, says that at first, he was somewhat hesitant to recommend joining the common core initiative.

“Although we are normally not big on signing up for national standards generally,” he says, “in this case we decided that we would because we felt we would be in the group of states that would be compatible with [the new standards]. And we also feel ultimately, the nation does need some focus in terms of our K-12 expectations, our K-12 assessments and what a graduating senior is expected to know as they apply for a college anywhere in the United States. We believe it is generally necessary and we’re going to be a part of it.”

Dalrymple says he was uncertain about how the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, which will have to approve any core content changes, will react to the final standards. He points out that some critics believe the state should carefully guard its right to shape its own standards and education policy.

“But on the other hand, if our state standards turn out to be very close to some kind of national goal, then … it’s not so much a matter of principle. From a practical standpoint, would it make any difference if we made some minor modifications to our state standards so we are in sync with the nation?”

Sen. Rich Wardner of North Dakota, a former educator, says that policymakers will carefully consider the decision and will look to neighboring states before they make a move. Kentucky already has gone on record to say it will adopt the new common core standards. Wardner says that kind of move by Kentucky, a state which he says is similar to North Dakota, carries weight with him.

Lisa Gross, director of the Division of Communications for the Kentucky Department of Education, says the state is eager to be a leader in education and has been taking aggressive steps for the past two decades to reform education.

“These standards are going to be higher, clearer and more rigorous,” Gross says. They will be very consistent among states. We will be able to say we know that students in Kentucky are learning the same thing as students in Connecticut. That’s key.”

She points out, for example, that states on the East Coast tend to have good educational outcomes, in part because they have rigorous standards.

“We want to be able to show our students are capable of reaching those standards too,” Gross says.

Rep. Greg Porter of Indiana, chair of the House Education Committee, says he also remains cautious about common core state standards until he finds out more about how the entire process will work.

“There’s always a level of apprehension,” Porter says. “The devil’s always in the details. … How do we get there together? We’re not going to [achieve educational proficiency] at the same time. Some are going to get there in two years or three years, some may take five years to get there.”

In the end, Porter says, he believes the new common core state standards will be adopted by the state board of education in Indiana. He says that the executive branch, in particular, is pushing for the reforms because of their potential not only to achieve educational improvements, but also to address concerns about implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and give Indiana a leg up on Race to the Top funding.

“I think in theory we want to take significant action steps and have systemic changes to deal with the 21st century and globalization. But everyone is not at the same spot. How do you get to where they want us to be?” Porter says.

Making comparisons among states

One reason proponents are advocating for states to adopt common core education standards is the inconsistency among states in what students are expected to learn in different grades.

For example, students whose state test score deems them “proficient” in one state might not necessarily be considered proficient in a different state.

Since educational standards vary, how do policymakers find out how their standards compare with those in other states?

One available resource is the National Center for Education Statistics’ “State mapping” tool.

Since 2003, the NCES has been translating individual states’ standards onto a common scale: the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The NAEP, or “The Nation’s Report Card,” is a standardized assessment given to students throughout the country.

By converting students’ performance on state standards to the NAEP, policymakers can gauge how rigorous their standards are compared with those of other states.

For more information on the study, visit http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping.

CSSG to offer Webinar on standards

Do you want to learn more about the Common Core State Standards Initiative and what it might mean for your state? Join CSSG on a Webinar, “Common Core State Standards,” which will take place at 3 p.m. Wednesday, March 10. Go to www.cssg.org/policy/EdWebinar to register.

For more information about state efforts to improve education and standards in science, technology, engineering and math [STEM fields], please visit www.cssgmidwest.org.

NAEP-equivalent scores for state mathematics proficiency standards (2007)*

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*Information not available
* For 4th graders, a score of 214 is considered “basic” performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. 214 is considered “proficient” for 4th graders, a score of 242 is considered “advanced” and 299 is “nationally representative.”

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.
I n November 2008, tragedy struck in Milwaukee, Wis., and sent shock waves throughout the state. A 13-month-old boy, who had been placed by the state in the care of his aunt, was beaten to death. Christopher Thomas, 2-year-old sister was also brutally abused, but survived.

The case rocked the state’s child-welfare system and sparked public outcry over how such a heinous crime could occur on the state’s watch. At the same time, a brand-new state agency charged with coordinating child protection was responding to reports that a state-financed child-care system was riddled with fraud.

Sen. Robert Jauch, who has led the legislature’s response to the scandals, calls the situation a “perfect storm” that has led to some much-needed reforms in both the child-care and foster-care systems.

Child’s death spurs new regulations

Christopher’s death spurred an investigation by the Department of Children and Families, which found that a caseworker had recently visited the home — but had failed to find any signs of abuse. Since the tragedy, DCF has made a number of reforms to help prevent such a mistake from happening again.

“As a result of [Christopher’s] death, the department requires routine physical exams for all children, making sure that kids in foster care are routinely being seen in the medical community,” Jauch says. “So you have a third party looking over and protecting the interest of those kids. A lot of good has come from a horrible situation.”

The DCF was forced to respond, too, to widespread public criticism in the crime’s aftermath. When news of Christopher’s death hit the media spotlight, state officials did not comment on the situation, fueling public indignation.

New legislation (SB 299) approved in November implemented new disclosure laws that require the department to communicate basic information about a serious case of neglect or abuse within four days.

A more thorough report is now required within 90 days, including a review of the steps being taken to prevent another incident. In addition, SB 299 expands mandatory reporting to cases of egregious abuse or suicide.

“People were angry,” says Jauch, chair of the Senate Committee on Children and Families and Workforce Development. “Failure to divulge information upset the public as much as the crime itself.”

Audit reveals widespread fraud

Meanwhile, Jauch has also been working on legislation to overhaul the Wisconsin Shares program, which was designed to help low-income parents pay for child care. About 60 percent of child-care centers in the state receive Wisconsin Shares subsidies.

Last year, a series of articles by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel spurred a statewide investigation and audit of the $400 million program.

The investigation found what Jauch calls a “large-scale pattern of abuse” of the program. Some child-care providers, for example, were claiming many more hours of work than they actually performed. In so-called “child-care rings,” groups of parents were setting up fake day care centers — but instead keeping their children home and collecting payments from the state.

In some cases, state investigators visited addresses of purported child-care facilities, which had been receiving state subsidies, only to find them shuttered.

A Legislative Audit Bureau found at least $22 million in improper payments in 2008. More than 100 providers have lost their licenses.

The audit also suggested a number of steps the state could take to improve accountability and reduce fraud in Wisconsin Shares, and lawmakers have worked on several bills to achieve those goals.

The state’s economic stimulus bill, passed early last year, created a team of five investigators charged with tracking down fraud and abuse, as well as recovering overpayments. It also authorized the state to launch an “automated attendance system,” which would provide parents with a swipe card or other means of checking their children in and out of child care. The new system, expected to be launched this year, would help the state more accurately keep track of how many hours providers are working, as well as how many children they are caring for.

Lawmakers approved other administrative changes as part of the state’s budget bill, passed in June. Among other changes, the measure allows payments to be immediately suspended in cases of fraud or abuse; prohibits providers’ or employees’ children and relatives from making up more than 40 percent of clients; limits maximum hours of care to 12 per day, unless the parent provides documentation for needing longer care; and provides for a better system for flagging irregularities in hours usage to ensure that providers are not overstating hours.

This fall, lawmakers worked on legislation (SB 280) that gives the state more authority to recover payments of fraudulent claims by going after individual owners or employees who have at least a 20 percent stake in the operation. Previous state law made it difficult for the state to collect payments from businesses that had shut down.

Safety issues uncovered

While the financial fraud in Wisconsin Shares was alarming, some people were even more concerned by a number of safety-related issues brought up in the investigation.

It was discovered, for example, that the state did not routinely cross-reference the names of people living in homes that served as child-care centers against the sex-offender registry. In September, four sex offenders were found to share an address with a child-care facility.

The audit also found eight cases in which convicted felons or people who had abused or neglected children were employed by or living in child-care facilities.

In response, Jauch and his colleagues quickly got to work on laws aimed at better monitoring people with licenses to provide child care. SB 331, passed last year and signed by Gov. Jim Doyle in November, bars people who have been convicted of certain offenses (such as murder or kidnapping) from being licensed to provide child care. Less serious offenses require a waiting period after prison time and/or probation.

In addition, background checks will now be conducted on child-care providers every three months, instead of every four years.

Jauch points out that the fraud occurring in the Wisconsin Shares program has been a wake-up call, and that he doesn’t think his state is alone.

“I don’t believe the Wisconsin experience is much different than many other states with large urban areas,” he says.

He urges his colleagues in legislatures to consider taking “the same kind of aggressive steps we have taken to enact vigorous and aggressive oversight in cooperation with local law enforcement, the Office of Justice Assistance, and state and federal officials to identify and hold accountable those who are bleeding the system.”

Next: Focus on quality

Jauch would like to see the state focus on the quality of child care.

“It is one thing to say you want to provide a safe environment … but you also want one that motivates the child, nourishes the child, enriches their intellect and their social skills, and really does help them grow,” he says.

Doyle has proposed a new rating system for child-care facilities in the state. Providers would be given anywhere from one to five stars, based on the education level of the staff, the strength of the curriculum, the business practices being used, and other criteria.

Jauch supports the initiative, which must be approved by the Joint Finance Committee.
Ohio Sen. Nina Turner
Former legislative staffer, college professor believes in the power of education

by Kathryn Tormey (ktormey@csg.org)

Ohio Sen. Nina Turner believes that education is the key to building strong communities. And to remind her of that fact, Turner carries around a letter she received from a young constituent who was a student at Kent State University. The young man wrote to Turner to tell her that he would be the first person in his family to graduate from college, and how much that meant to him.

A first-generation college graduate herself, Turner says she can identify with the young man’s situation. Each time she steps into the classroom at Cuyahoga Community College, where she teaches history and urban studies, she tries to relate her own experience.

“I feel through my own story what education can do,” says the Democrat from Cleveland. “I want to be the voice that empowers them to change their lives through education.”

But she also keeps the letter for another reason: It reminds her of the choice young people sometimes have to make between their home and their career. In the letter, the young man explains that he’d like to stay in Ohio — but that he is concerned about finding a job there.

Turner says the young man’s story is like so many others throughout the state, and has made job creation one of her top legislative priorities.

Since being appointed to the Senate in 2008, Turner has also become a passionate advocate for education as a way to combat poverty and make her state competitive in the search for skilled workers.

Focus on local issues

Turner began her political career as a member of the Cleveland City Council. Though Turner is now working at the state level, she still keeps her finger on the pulse of what is going on in her community.

Last year, funding for local libraries was on the chopping block as lawmakers worked to address a $3.2 billion budget gap. Turner received thousands of e-mails and hundreds of phone calls asking her to oppose a reduction in funding.

“The citizens in my district’s family,” Turner says, “are depending on you to move forward their agenda and their concerns.”

There are crucial decisions that one has to make. “[For example, last year] in Ohio we had a $3.2 billion budget deficit that we tried to close. And we cut departments and services, and that’s really hard because government is in the business of service. And there’s so much you can cut before any further cuts would be so damaging that it just doesn’t make a whole lot of sense.”

Once we overcame an initial deficit of $3.2 billion, we were in the hole once more to the tune of $851 million, this time directed at the K-12 budget.

How do we deal with that? “That was very difficult and very challenging.”

Last month, Turner spoke with CSG Midwest about her path to the legislature and her policy priorities. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

Q: You began your career in state government as an intern, and later you worked as a legislative aide in the Ohio Senate. How did that experience prepare you for legislative work and how is it different from being an elected official?

A: [Working on the legislative staff] definitely opened my eyes to what legislators have to do on a regular basis. [Now] I am the one that has to cast the votes on behalf of the people I represent.

Before, I was in an advisory role for the member that I served, and now it’s me who sits in that seat. There is definitely a lot of pressure because people are depending on you to move forward their agenda and their concerns.

There are crucial decisions that one has to make. “In Ohio we had a $3.2 billion budget deficit that we tried to close. And we cut departments and services, and that’s really hard because government is in the business of service. And there’s only so much you can cut before any further cuts would be so damaging that it just doesn’t make a whole lot of sense.”

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Q: Have you had a big education budget crisis in your district? What did you do in your role as legislator to respond?

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Q: What tools does your state have available to advance economic development?

A: We do have a very good vehicle that we are working on that needs to be renewed, it’s called the Third Frontier. That was first approved by the voters in 2005, and it is an initiative to create biomedical, advanced materials, alternative energy, and other types of high tech jobs.

One of the things that we were able to accomplish was 41,000 jobs created through the approval of the Third Frontier, and the General Assembly is dealing with that once again to put it on the ballot so the voters in this state can renew the Third Frontier initiative.

We need to fight very hard to make sure that we educate the voters that their investment in the Third Frontier, which is a bond initiative, is worth it. It passed the first time with bipartisan support in both houses and the voters approved it, and we need to renew it so we can increase our ability to bring jobs into our economy.

Q: How have you been working on your goal of improving safety in your district?

A: A postal worker was killed in my district … in broad daylight. He was gunned down.

I am pushing for legislation right now to increase the penalties for offenses when a public utility worker is a victim. Workers from the private sector come into communities, and although they work in the private sector they are also [advancing the] public good.

For me, the penalty matters, but it’s also the education effort to get out the word that this state is not going to tolerate attacks on people who come into the community to build our communities up.

It really is bigger than a law, it’s really an issue of community involvement as well.

When it’s all said and done, community safety should be a priority for everyone, [from people] in the neighborhood all the way up to law enforcement.

We have to begin to have these conversations in and around our communities.

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We have to begin to have these conversations in and around our communities.

Q: You worked on a bill that would allow young people to get course credit for taking part in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. What does it entail?

A: We have junior ROTC programs in our schools and somehow they were taken off of the list to be eligible for high school credit. So I worked with one of my Republican colleagues in the Senate to introduce SB 190, to include the junior ROTC as a permitted elective in the Ohio Core Curriculum.

These students learn so much from programs like JROTC. Discipline, honor and duty — those are good characteristics to have if you serve in the military or not, and this experience makes them better equipped as young people to become the productive citizens of tomorrow.
Senators taking aim at issue of unsafe nursing homes in Illinois

Violent crime, understaffing, racial gaps in care among concerns

by Illinois Sen. Mattie Hunter

This year, Illinois’ Senate Public Health and Human Services committees made a commitment to address nursing home safety and the disparities facing minorities in Illinois nursing homes.

With the number of elderly citizens throughout the state increasing rapidly, the quality of care that they receive has become an even more pertinent issue.

The care that nursing home residents receive is simply inadequate and insufficient. Illinois is arguably the worst state in the nation for care, especially for African-American seniors.

According to an investigation by the monthly magazine The Chicago Reporter, only one predominantly African-American nursing home in Illinois is rated “excellent” by the federal government.

However, most majority-black facilities received the worst federal ratings possible, and on average they have more violations than do facilities where a majority of residents are white. In Chicago, these homes have more medical-malpractice and personal-injury lawsuits.

People in majority-white nursing homes receive better care than those in African-American nursing homes, even if both serve low-income seniors.

There are huge disparities in quality of treatment between nursing home facilities on the South Side of Chicago and facilities in the suburban areas outside Chicago.

Homes rarely held accountable

The inadequacy of care in all nursing homes, especially those on the South Side, is disturbing, and although facilities can risk losing their certification and Medicaid funding for failing to meet federal standards, they rarely do. In fact, according to the Reporter, only five of the approximately 16,000 Medicaid-certified facilities in the United States lost their funding in the past year.

Other problems involving nursing home safety must also be addressed.

In a recent three-part series, the Chicago Tribune revealed that Illinois nursing homes have a dangerous mix of elderly residents and poorly supervised, mentally ill felons. It also exposed the fact that the background-check procedure for younger criminals placed in homes because of psychiatric disorders is insufficient. Also, due to low staffing levels at many facilities, there were many breakdowns in reporting assaults and crimes.

Furthermore, Illinois houses mentally ill patients in nursing homes at a greater rate than any other state, which increases the risk of other patients being harmed.

Staffing deficiencies a major problem

Understaffed nursing homes are my greatest concern, because these facilities are unable to adequately meet the needs of both their senior and mentally ill populations. These deficiencies have directly led to unsafe conditions for all patients. Many families expressed concerns about the poor training and inexperience of staff who are taking care of their loved ones.

For example, nursing home facilities in the Chicago suburbs with 84 percent white residents receive 5.53 hours of staff care per day, whereas predominantly African-American nursing homes in Chicago’s urban areas receive 1.73 to 2.04 hours of staff care per day.

This disparity is horrific and needs to be addressed by the state.

Illinois must start asking the tough questions: Are resources being equally distributed? What are the racial disparities between nursing homes, and how can we change them? Do we need to change our existing regulatory laws?

This past fall, we held two joint Senate hearings to collect truthful and accurate information regarding the care nursing home residents receive. The hearings featured testimony from families of residents, state agencies, patients’ advocates, and representatives from the nursing home industry.

My Senate colleagues and I will introduce legislation addressing these critical problems during the upcoming 2010 General Assembly. I expect the new legislation will make many changes to the regulatory laws already in place, including adding harsher penalties for those who continuously fail to meet safety requirements.

Giving people more facts

Although everyone wants swift action on nursing home reform, the safety of our senior citizens and disabled family members is too important to put at risk with slapdash, ill-conceived legislation.

In an effort to take an immediate step, the Senate Human Services and Public Health committees worked with state and advocacy groups to put together an online guide to help family members’ decision-making process when choosing a nursing home for their loved ones.

The online guide, which is posted on my Web site (www.senate-dem.illinois.gov/index.php/ sen-hunter-home), includes links to organizations with a vested interest in providing information on nursing homes throughout the state. The guide offers information and helps people compare the answers when choosing where their loved one will reside.

We encourage Illinoisans to use these tools to extensively research and visit each nursing home and have all of their questions thoroughly answered.

Understaffed nursing homes are a primary concern, because such facilities are unable to adequately meet the needs of both their senior and mentally ill populations. These deficiencies have directly led to unsafe conditions for all patients.

We still have a long fight ahead for better care for nursing home residents, but it’s an absolutely vital issue we must embrace.

It is important to me as a state senator and as chairperson of the Human Services Committee that we pass meaningful legislation this year that will solve this disturbing problem once and for all.

But until then, we must ensure that our citizens have the tools they need, and the accessibility to their elected officials, in order to protect their loved ones from nursing home neglect.

I will continue this fight to ensure that all senior citizens receive the quality of care they deserve.

Illinois Sen. Mattie Hunter, a Democrat from Chicago, was appointed to the Senate in 2003. She is chair of the Human Services Committee and vice chair of the Public Health Committee. She can be contacted via e-mail at hunter@senate.state.il.us.

Submissions welcome

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. We accept submissions on a wide range of public policy issues and state initiatives. The opinions expressed on this page do not reflect those of The Council of State Governments or the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Responses to any FirstPerson article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630/925-1922 or tanderson@csg.org.
New CSG report says Midwest is leading nation in creation of green jobs

Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, states are participating in programs designed to spur employment in all areas, especially ‘green’ jobs. A recent report compiled by The Council of State Governments’ office in Washington, D.C., concludes that the Midwest led the nation in creating or saving green jobs.

There is no one definition of a green job; in the most general sense, it is employment on a project that is designed to benefit the environment or to improve energy efficiency.

The Midwest has made strides in this area, leading the other regions in green job creation through the October Recovery Act reporting deadline.

Three federal agencies host the majority of ARRA programs with funding for green job creation: the Department of Energy; the Department of Labor and the Environmental Protection Agency. An analysis by CSG’s Washington, D.C., Office shows that nationwide, 13,151 green jobs were created or saved as a result of these agencies’ ARRA programs as of Sept. 30, 2009. More than one-third of those jobs were in the Midwest and created or saved through such programs as the Weatherization Assistance Program; the Brownfields Revitalization Recovery Plan; and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant.

Most of the EPA money was distributed by the first reporting deadline, but the departments of energy and labor still have plenty of programs to fund that have green job potential. For example, at the beginning of January, the Department of Labor released nearly $100 million in green-job training grants.

Congress is also considering a job-creation bill. As of late January, HR 2847 had passed the House and contained $275 million for careers in energy efficiency and renewable energy. The Senate is expected to take up consideration of the bill in February with a considerable push from the administration as the unemployment rate hovers at 10 percent.

The full CSG report on green jobs is available at www.staterecovery.org, a Web site created last year by CSG’s Washington, D.C., office to help policymakers understand the programs and funds available through ARRA.

The D.C. office represents the CSG regional offices in the nation’s capital by advocating regional positions on federal legislation and rulemaking to Congress, the administration, and agencies.

Recently, in addition to the Recovery Act, the D.C. Office has focused on federal initiatives regarding health reform, transportation reauthorization and climate change.

Green jobs created in the Midwest as a result of ARRA (through Sept. 30, 2009)

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* Numbers are current as of the most recent reporting deadline for states, which was Oct. 1, 2009. The national average was 2,490 jobs created per state.

Source: The Council of State Governments

Agriculture, rural leaders hold conference

Last month, legislators from every Midwestern Legislative Conference state and two member provinces joined agriculture and rural leaders from across North America to work on key issues facing rural communities.

The 8th annual State Legislative Agriculture Chairs Summit was held by State Agriculture and Rural Leaders and was co-sponsored by The Council of State Governments.

Discussion topics during the two-day summit included: the increasing burden of federal mandates; regulations related to air and water quality; endangered species; food safety; energy policy and cap and trade; new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency directives overriding state control of water quality standards; and proposed regulations regarding dust. These issues pose challenges for states already facing economic stress, and summit participants used the meeting to help them understand how their colleagues in other states and provinces are addressing the issues.

An international discussion looked at ways to strengthen the agricultural economy of both the United States and Canada. Canadian Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz opened the event and shared his thoughts on the common issues facing rural communities on either side of the border.

Iowa Sen. David Johnson moved into the role of immediate past president, while South Dakota Rep. Tom Deadrick was elected vice president of SARL. South Dakota Rep. Larry Rhoden and Manitoba MLA Ralph Eichler were elected to the board of directors. North Dakota Rep. Wes Belter continues as treasurer.

For more information about SARL, visit www.agandruralleaders.org

CSG meeting will focus on economy

In light of the economic crisis states are facing, CSG’s spring conference will focus exclusively on economic and fiscal issues. The Economic Summit of the States will be held May 20-23 in New York City.

The meeting will feature a presentation from Frank Luntz, a political pollster and communications consultant. Luntz has become one of the premier sources of information on American culture and opinion for politicians and media outlets alike, and has been a guest on TV shows such as ‘Meet the Press’ and ‘The Jim Lehrer News Hour.’

Luntz is author of ‘Words that Work,’ which explores the use of language in the political arena. His most recent book, ‘What Americans Really Want ... Really,’ is a commentary on the hopes and fears of the American people.

Both books, which were New York Times best sellers, draw on Luntz’s experience conducting thousands of surveys, focus groups and polls to better understand how Americans feel about their government, their communities and everyday life.

The summit will also host sessions on a variety of economic and fiscal issues facing state policymakers, such as state strategies for emerging from the recession.

For more information about the Economic Summit of the States or to register for the meeting, visit www.csg.org

Apply online for Toll Fellows program

Applications are now available online for The Council of State Governments’ national leadership institute, the Henry Toll Fellowship Program.

Each year, 40 legislators gather in Lexington, Ky., home of CSG’s headquarters, for an intensive leadership program. Toll Fellows are chosen on a nonpartisan, competitive basis by a panel of alumni.

Toll Fellows is designed for mid-career state officials from all three branches of government.

During the six-day program, participants take part in sessions designed to enhance their leadership and policymaking skills.

In recent years, Toll Fellows have attended sessions focusing on effective communication, personality assessment, crisis management and adaptive leadership. The program also offers a networking opportunity for officials from around the nation.

CSG covers the cost of lodging and meals during the program, and participants are responsible for the cost of travel to Lexington.

Applications are available on CSG’s Web site (www.csg.org/TollFellowsApplication), and the deadline is April 23. For more information, contact Krista Rinehart at 859/244-8249 or krinehart@csg.org.
Make plans now to attend this summer’s MLC Annual Meeting in Toronto

Registration is now open for the 65th MLC Annual Meeting, which will be held Aug. 8-11 in Toronto, Ontario. Ohio Sen. Steve Buehrer, the MLC’s chair, will provide over the meeting of state lawmakers from the Midwestern states and provinces.

This year’s meeting will be co-hosted by Ontario Speaker Steve Peters and his colleagues in the Legislative Assembly.

The conference will feature a presentation by Rex Murphy, one of Canada’s best-known political commentators.

Murphy hosts a weekly live call-in radio show, “Cross Country Checkup,” on which he moderates a discussion of current events and encourages his audience to offer their opinions and insights. He regularly appears on CBC’s “The National” and is a columnist for The National Post.

Murphy will speak to attendees about “communicating in an age of clamor” and how politics, business and the media shape how we interact.

This year’s meeting will also feature policy sessions on issues of importance to Midwestern legislators. Please check our Web site (www.csgmidwest.org) in the coming months for updates on the business agenda.

The family-friendly meeting will also provide lawmakers from around the region with networking opportunities. Evening social events will include a baseball game between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Boston Red Sox, as well as a reception in Ontario’s historic Legislative Building.

This year, attendees will have the unique opportunity to take part in a trip to see Niagara Falls. This optional activity will take place in the afternoon and evening of Wednesday, Aug. 11, and will likely require a Wednesday night stay. Attendees are encouraged to make their travel plans accordingly.

A valid passport is also required for travel between the United States and Canada. To learn more about obtaining or renewing a passport, visit http://travel.state.gov.

For more information about this year’s MLC Annual Meeting in Toronto, or to register, please visit www.csgmidwest.org or call CSG’s Midwestern Office at 630/925-1922.

Application due soon for leadership program designed for region’s newer legislators

The March 22 deadline for applying for a fellowship for the 16th annual Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD) is quickly approaching, and all Midwestern legislators in their first four years of service are encouraged to apply.

The 2010 program will be held in Madison, Wis., July 9-13.

Fellowships will be awarded to 36 Midwestern lawmakers through a competitive, nonpartisan application process. The fellowship covers the cost of tuition, lodging and meals. Each participant also is eligible for a nominal travel stipend, which helps cover the cost of travel to and from Madison.

Staff and members of the BILLD Steering Committee are hard at work planning for this summer’s program, which will be held in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs. This collaboration allows the institute to tap into the expertise of top scholars in a variety of policy areas.

BILLD fellows also receive training from professional development experts and current and former legislative leaders from across the region.

The institute features three core areas — leadership training seminars, professional development workshops and policy analysis sessions — all aimed at improving the leadership and policymaking skills of newer legislators in the Midwestern region.

This year’s curriculum will provide training in areas such as leadership styles, consensus building, time management, and communicating in an age of clamor. The agenda will include policy discussions focusing on the fiscal conditions of the Midwestern states, corrections and multi-state collaborative efforts.

Since its inception in 1995, the Bowhay Institute has grown into the premier leadership training program for Midwestern legislators. More than 500 Midwestern lawmakers have graduated from BILLD, many of whom have gone on to hold key leadership positions in their legislatures.

Contact Laura A. Tomaka (630/925-1922 or ltomaka@csg.org) for a copy of the application. Applicants also may visit the CSG Midwest Web site (www.csgmidwest.org) to access the application.

CSG MIDWEST

UPCOMING MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE AND THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS EVENTS

APPLICATION DEADLINE FOR THE BOWHAY INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

March 22, 2010
Contact: Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org)
630/925-1922
www.csgmidwest.org/About/BILLD.htm

CSG 2010 ECONOMIC SUMMIT OF THE STATES

New York, New York
May 19-23, 2010
Contact: registrations@csg.org
800/888-1910
www.csg.org

16TH ANNUAL BOWHAY INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (BILLD)

Madison, Wisconsin
July 9-13, 2010
Contact: Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org)
630/925-1922
www.csgmidwest.org/About/BILLD.htm

65TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

Toronto, Ontario
August 8-11, 2010
Contact: csgm@csg.org
630/925-1922
www.csgmidwest.org

LOOKING FOR MORE?

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT KEY POLICY ISSUES IN THE STATES, TURN TO FIRSTLINE MIDWEST. PAST EDITIONS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.CSGMIDWEST.ORG. RECENT EDITIONS HAVE EXPLORED:

TACTICS FOR TRIMMING BUDGETS IN MIDWESTERN STATES

(January 2010)

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE STATE REVENUES IN TOUGH FISCAL TIMES

(December 2009)

ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

(November 2009)

FEDERAL HEALTH CARE REFORM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR STATES

(October 2009)
**CAPITOL CLIPS**

**A ruckus over office of lieutenant governor**

The primary victory in Illinois of a little-known political newcomer has raised questions about how candidates for lieutenant governor are chosen — and about the office itself.

In February, Scott Lee Cohen withdrew from the November election following a blitz of media coverage about past legal problems. Though Cohen ran for lieutenant governor separately from Gov. Pat Quinn in the Democratic primary, the two would have appeared on the same ticket this fall. Some political leaders, including Quinn, are now calling for candidates for governor and lieutenant governor to be jointly nominated, a process already used in Kansas, Minnesota, North Dakota and Ohio.

According to the Chicago Sun-Times, Illinois legislators are also now considering a proposal to eliminate this constitutional office. Duties of the office vary from state to state, depending in part on decisions made by the governors. In the Midwest, some lieutenant governors have been put in charge of entire departments. For example, Becky Skillman leads the Indiana Department of Agriculture, and Rick Sheely is Nebraska Department of Homeland Security director. Minnesota Lt. Gov. Carol Molnau served as transportation commissioner before being dismissed by the Senate in 2008. Molnau’s supporters argued that she was doing both jobs simultaneously. S.B. 77, introduced last year, would require all adults who are charged with a felony to submit a DNA sample to law enforcement.

In addition, the bill would require “blind” suspect lineups, in which the officer either does not know the identity of the suspect or uses a photo lineup in which only the witness can view the pictures.

The state’s former attorney general points out that in more than 200 DNA exonerations in this country, 75 percent involved witnesses who identified the wrong person in a lineup, reports The Columbus Dispatch.

S.B. 77 passed the Senate with one dissenting vote in June, but has been subject to criticism from groups who question the bill’s provisions. The bill was approved last month by a House committee.

**Major criminal-justice bill gains ground in Ohio**

A controversial bill that some are calling one of the most important pieces of criminal-justice legislation to be considered by the Ohio General Assembly in a century is gaining traction.

S.B. 77, introduced last year, would require all adults who are charged with a felony to submit a DNA sample to law enforcement.

The bill would require law enforcement to keep biological evidence for up to 30 years in murder and sexual-assault cases, and would open up DNA testing to paroleses. Supporters say the increased use of DNA evidence will help prevent wrongful convictions in the state.

In addition, the bill would require “blind” suspect lineups, in which the officer either does not know the identity of the suspect or uses a photo lineup in which only the witness can view the pictures.

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**Minnesota system will identify painkiller abusers**

A new statewide database will help Minnesota officials identify people who might be abusing prescription drugs.

As of Jan. 1, pharmacies must keep track of certain information for every prescription they fill, such as the name and address of the patient and the prescribing physician. The information goes into a statewide database, which will allow health professionals to find out whether patients are getting prescriptions for painkillers — such as Vicodin and OxyContin — from multiple doctors or pharmacies.

About 117,000 Minnesota adults abuse prescription drugs each year, reports the Twin Cities’ Star Tribune.

Proponents say the database is a huge step toward preventing “doctor shopping,” when patients seek the powerful drugs from many different sources in order to feed a drug habit and avoid tipping off providers or pharmacists.

But critics point out that the new law could make doctors more reluctant to write prescriptions for pain medication because they fear they are being scrutinized.

Minnesota is the 34th state to monitor prescriptions for controlled substances, reports the Star Tribune. The database is being funded through a $400,000 federal grant and will track more than one million prescriptions each year.

The Minnesota Prescription Monitoring Program should be fully functional by March.

**States push e-filing as money and time saver**

The return of income-tax season has states making what has now become a standard pitch. Please file your returns electronically.

And e-filing may be especially important this year in the region’s fiscally strapped states. In Iowa, for example, budget constraints will result in “reduced staffing levels and no temporary employees” during tax season, notes Department of Revenue director Mark Schuling.

Last year, 74 percent of Iowa returns were filed electronically. Meanwhile, Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman has set a goal of raising his state’s e-filing rate from 70 percent to 75 percent, the Omaha World-Herald reports.

While reducing errors and eliminating refund waiting times for users, e-filing saves states money. Heineman says Nebraska has been able to cut in half the number of temporary workers it hires for tax season. In 2008, e-filing by Illinois taxpayers saved the state from having to process and store 10 million pieces of paper.

And Indiana tax administrators estimate that it cost the state more than $2.3 million to process more than 1 million paper returns in 2008, compared to $150,000 to process more than 1.8 million electronic returns.

According to the Federation of Tax Administrators, many states now have e-filing mandates for tax preparers, including Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin.