

CHAPTER I

The Horizon in 1935

The Present and Projected Services of the Association

LEGISLATIVE conditions in the United States are satisfactory to no one. Criticism of them is universal and perennial. Something must be done to improve these conditions and, at the same time, to give a constructive turn to this criticism.

Obviously, the primary responsibility rests upon the state legislators themselves. But they can accomplish little if they work single-handed or by units, which are merely state-wide.

By organizing the American Legislators' Association, responsibly-minded legislators in all of the states have recognized and assumed their obligation to better this situation.

The ideal is this: for every state, legislators of the best type, efficiently organized; for every legislator, adequate expert assistance and the best of information.

The outstanding features of the Association's activities are:

The Interstate Reference Bureau

Jointly with the Council of State Governments, the Association operates the Interstate Reference Bureau:

1. *To assist each state to maintain an adequate legislative reference service, providing:*

(a) *Research service* to help any member of the legislature who desires aid in securing and analyzing information which will help him to determine whether legislation of a proposed character is desirable, and if so, what its provision should be.

(b) *Drafting service* to help any member of the legislature, on request, to draft a bill which he wishes to introduce.

(c) *Revision service* continually to

"work over" the compiled statutes, in order that appropriate sections may be repealed, condensed, reconciled, clarified, and simplified, and that the whole may be effectively codified.

The Interstate Reference Bureau plans to make available the services of an expert who will, upon request, visit a state legislative reference bureau and assist it in organizing or improving its work.

2. *To serve as a clearing house for all of the state legislative reference services* which desire this assistance—and apparently they all desire it. At present the legislative reference services in about twenty-five states are actively functioning. Without the Interstate Reference Bureau, none of them can collect all the most up-to-date information which each of the other bureaus is preparing or has on hand. Through its cooperation, digests of the legislation of the forty-eight states on a given subject made by one bureau will be available for the others. This plan will also enable the state services to avoid duplication of work. As the number of active state services increases, the necessity for such a clearing house on state legislation becomes increasingly imperative.

3. *To serve as "an informational switch-board"* through which any legislator or the director of any legislative reference bureau can "plug in" by letter or by telegram, and at once be connected with the best source of information or advice in the United States concerning his current problems. This Association considers it a matter of more immediate importance to increase the availability of the vast amount of work already being done by a great number of other responsible agencies, than to conduct original studies: Accordingly, it began by

compiling a list of the best sources of information. However, it often finds opportunity to increase the usefulness of existing reports by preparing synopses of them.

4. *To conduct original researches* when the circumstances require it; and especially to make an intensive and exhaustive study of the means for increasing the efficiency of the various legislatures. This study necessitates a consideration of the means for improving the personnel of our legislatures, and for inducing more citizens of the best type to become candidates for their respective legislatures. The initial effort in this respect has been a survey of existing practices in such matters as:

- a. Length of term of office,
- b. Compensation,
- c. Size of legislature,
- d. Length of sessions,
- e. Legislative reference services.

These studies have been followed by a survey of the personnel of the legislatures to ascertain four important facts about each of the 7,500 legislators: age, occupation, party affiliation, and previous legislative experience. Such a survey has been completed for the past biennium, and the machinery is in order for collecting similar information concerning the new recruits. This material will become increasingly valuable when trends can be determined over a period of years.

5. *To publish the magazine, "State Government,"* which is eventually to be mailed each month to every one of the 7,500 state legislators and to numerous state officials throughout the United States. It contains information: concerning new reports, periodicals and books; concerning significant legislative innovations; concerning noteworthy practices which increase legislative efficiency; concerning recommendations made to legislatures by the Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, the National Education Association, the American Bar Association, the American Medical Association, the National Conference of Social Work, and by scores of other reputable organizations; and concerning outstanding contributions to every branch of the science of state government. Sometimes an entire issue is devoted to a single subject; for example, there have been specific numbers on taxation, unemploy-

ment, education, banking, and aids to justice.

6. *To issue special bulletins* containing material of interest to legislative reference bureaus and research groups, such as surveys of the statutes of the states on important subjects.

7. *To work with universities* and other agencies which desire cooperation in educational work concerning legislative subjects.

Regional Secretariats

The Association plans to organize six or more regional secretariats in natural divisions of the country, such as New England, and the southeastern states. Each secretariat will serve the legislators and administrative officials of the states in its region more promptly than is possible from the Chicago office. Regional boundaries will be drawn to include states having a community of interests. The secretariat may then adapt its services to the demands of the particular region. These regional clearing houses of information will bring about closer cooperation and coordination between the states within their respective regions. By clearing in turn with the central office, the states, through the services of their Association, can unite to deal with problems of nationwide or regional scope.

Conferences

The Association arranges the following meetings:

1. *An Annual Conference open to all legislators*, at which addresses are delivered on questions of legislative efficiency, as well as on the substance of legislation in various fields. Eight such conferences have been held—some at the same time and place as the meetings of the American Bar Association and of the Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, and others in connection with the National Conference on Government.

2. *An annual meeting of the directors of the legislative reference bureaus* of the various states. When possible, this meeting is scheduled at the same place and at the same time as the Association's Annual Conference.

3. *Regional meetings of legislators, experts, and officials* from a group of contiguous states whose problems are similar.

The first conference of this kind was held at Asheville, North Carolina, in September, 1932. Here delegates from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and West Virginia, met to discuss the crucial problems which would confront their legislative assemblies at the next sessions. The success of this experiment indicates that these meetings can perform a useful function, and the Association hopes eventually to arrange such meetings in all sections of the country.

4. *Conferences for all of the legislators in individual states:* to increase perspective and to facilitate planning. Through these meetings, ideas developed at a regional conference can be communicated to the entire membership of a state legislature. Lawmakers can then discuss their problems and plan a legislative program in advance of the hectic and limited days of the actual session.

Interstate Assembly

A biennial session of the Interstate Assembly also forms a part of the Association's project. This Assembly consists of legislators, chosen by each branch of each legislature, and of the Governors or representatives of Governors. Of course, such a group will have no authority, but it will have various possibilities of an advisory character. For instance, it can gauge the sentiment of the legislatures to determine whether the majority are disposed to consider at their next sessions any given proposal for uniform laws. Through section meetings it may offer a readier interchange of views to

facilitate the drafting of thoroughly acceptable interstate compacts on some occasions. It may furnish an easier channel of informal communication in regard to the relation between state and federal governments in some matters such, for instance, as state aid or state cooperation in the enforcement of federal statutes. More wholehearted cooperation between neighboring states in the development or conservation of natural resources will sometimes result from informal discussion by representative legislators. From the Interstate Assembly also grew the Interstate Commission on Conflicting Taxation which has achieved outstanding success and approbation.

Integration of Governmental Research

The American Legislators' Association helps to integrate the efforts of numerous reputable agencies which are working for the improvement of government. Among the many organizations in this field, some are primarily concerned with problems of city government, and others with problems of county, state, or federal government; but mutual benefit will result if their work is more closely interrelated. Research in political science is being done and material is being compiled by organizations of public officials, by educational institutions, by governmental departments, by occupational organizations, by private institutions of public character, by disinterested research agencies, by chambers of commerce, and by an endless list of other types of organizations.