

PERSPECTIVES 2019-2020



Eastern Regional Conference
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS



During the CSG/ERC 2019 Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, the opening keynoter, public health expert Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, said that where people live is a critical factor in the quality of their health. If a community is lacking in good transportation options to allow people to access health care, or if members of that community lack access to good housing, good jobs, and healthy foods, public health suffers. Public health, Dr. El-Sayed said, is “what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions for people to be healthy.” But, he said, “there are no lobbyists for public health.” He added that state officials need to understand the daily lives of, and persistent issues faced by, the communities they represent; in other words, they need to be the lobbyists for their constituents.

Dr. El-Sayed’s comments prompted me to consider how the CSG Eastern Office has contributed to improving the well-being and effectiveness of the community we serve: state officials in the Eastern region of CSG.

A key component of CSG’s mission — nationally and regionally — is to provide training for state officials to enhance their communication, consensus building, negotiation, and other key leadership skills. Just as the availability of good housing, jobs, and safe neighborhoods is essential to producing positive public health outcomes, state government institutions need highly skilled policymakers who can advocate effectively for their communities.

The training programs the CSG Eastern Office provides for state officials in our region — EASTrain

and the Eastern Leadership Academy (ELA) — in addition to the national CSG Toll Fellowship program, are designed to improve state officials’ leadership skills and thereby enhance the capacity of state governments to meet the needs of their citizens. Regardless of the position they hold, legislators need to be able to persuade their fellow members to co-sponsor legislation, negotiate with members who have competing legislative proposals, forge consensus by working across the aisle and across the branches of government to find common ground, and enact legislative proposals into law. These skills, particularly in the current highly charged hyperpartisan atmosphere, and under the glare of social media, are ever more in demand.

Over the past year, in response to specific requests from state leaders, the CSG Eastern Office has held eight EASTrain programs in state capitols around the region. They included a day-and-a-half training program in January 2019 for the 15-member U.S. Virgin Islands Senate on media communications, building a culture of excellence through legislative leadership, and running effective committee meetings.

We held several training sessions in Harrisburg for Pennsylvania House and Senate members and staff on topics ranging from communicating with confidence to negotiation and conflict resolution. At the request of the New Hampshire House speaker, CSG/ERC provided training sessions in Concord on workplace harassment prevention as well as diversity and inclusion. We also held a training for Connecticut House members on finding their legislative voice.


In mid-December, we organized trainings for members of the Maine House on several topics, including time and priority management — a topic that is a regular component of our annual Eastern Leadership Academy

program. The typical elected official is pulled in many directions: serving their constituencies, running campaigns, attending events back in their districts, chairing or attending committee meetings and hearings, and, for many, earning a living outside the legislature. The workshop is designed to help members manage these competing demands on their time.

Given the diversity of interests, personalities, backgrounds, and experience elected officials and staff bring to state capitols, lawmaking is inherently a complex and challenging job. State legislatures have precious little time and resources to devote to training elected officials to cope with the pressures and complexities of serving in public office.

I believe CSG’s training programs are essential to our overall goal of strengthening state government institutions. I have profound admiration for the state, provincial, and territorial elected and appointed officials and staff who choose to apply to our five-day Eastern Leadership Academy program each year and who are willing to take the time to enhance their skills so they can be better equipped to do their jobs. I am equally grateful to the legislative leaders and senior staff who have invited us to bring our top-level executive trainers to state capitols to build the skills and capacity of their legislative bodies or organizations.

During his concluding remarks in Pittsburgh, Dr. El-Sayed told the state delegates in the room, “What you do can change the foundations of life for your constituents. You matter.” I couldn’t agree more, and I believe that by enhancing the skills of state officials to do this important work, through our training programs and public policy forums, we matter as well.


Wendell Hannaford
Director, CSG Eastern Office

CSG/ERC: Creating Policy Solutions

Since 1933, state officials have turned to The Council of State Governments (CSG) as an impartial source of research and information to help them meet the challenge of governing.

CSG, headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky, has four regional offices in the East, Midwest, South, and West.

CSG's Eastern Regional Conference (CSG/ERC) has been located in New York City since 1937. Our team of experienced policy staff support legislative, judicial and executive-branch officials from our 18 member jurisdictions in areas relating to agriculture, Canada/U.S. relations, education, energy and environment, fiscal affairs, health, international trade, and transportation.

CSG/ERC facilitates the exchange of ideas among its member states, provinces, and territories, promotes networking among members, and conducts fact-based research and analysis to help shape effective public policy.

We also conduct leadership training programs and advocate on the federal level for programs and policies beneficial to our region.

CSG/ERC is here for you. Call, email or visit us online at www.csg-erc.org.

The Council of State Governments

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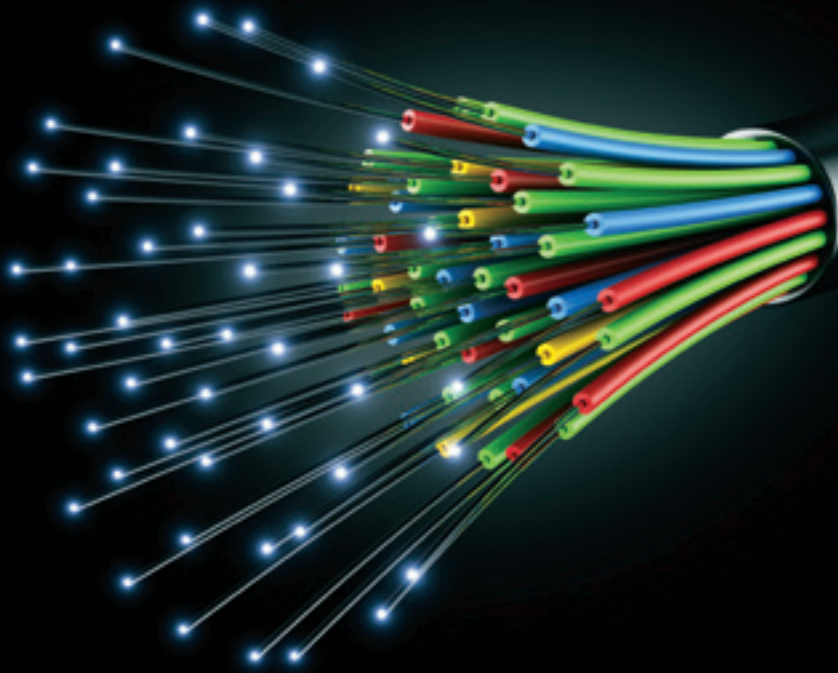
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Accessing Rural Broadband to Bridge the Digital Divide



Fiber-optic cable does not require electricity to operate and has nearly unlimited capacity, but currently, only a quarter of the United States has access to it, primarily in densely populated urban areas.

Nearly five years ago, the rural town of Leverett, Massachusetts, resolved to enter the digital age.

Residents were determined to get rid of their slow Internet service, which was transmitted over aging copper wires. The wires were so degraded that when it rained and they got wet, the connection was spotty. Local officials had tried to persuade the private sector to build a high-speed fiber-optic system, to no avail. So they took matters into their own hands.

The town formed the Leverett Municipal Light Plant, a public entity permitted by state law to sell telecommunications services. Next, it obtained a \$40,000 planning grant from a state agency that provides funding for broadband infrastructure in underserved areas. Then officials appealed to voters, who approved \$3.6 million in borrowing to hire a contractor to lay down fiber-optic cable. The town would own and operate the infrastructure under the authority of the municipal light plant. The plant contracted with an Internet service provider, and in August 2015, it began providing lightning-fast service to the town's 1,800 residents.

"Before, people couldn't sell their homes. Now housing prices are coming back," said Deb Socia, executive

director of Next Century Cities, a nonprofit that helps communities access affordable broadband, during a conference organized by CSG/ERC's Agriculture Policy Committee in Delaware last April.

Across the nation, closing the digital divide has become essential to the functioning of society, as more and more aspects of daily life become digitized — from homework assignments to job applications and health care services. And yet, more than 21 million Americans do not have access to broadband, according to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Several factors, including terrain, population density, and demographics, discourage the buildout to rural and low-income areas, because those projects typically result in a lower return on investment for broadband providers.

During 2019, CSG/ERC's Agriculture Policy Committee met with Socia and other experts working to overcome these hurdles. In a series of meetings, they discussed options to assist officials from rural and underserved communities in the Northeast who are hoping to bring their constituents into the era of modern telecommunications.

A National Problem

At least 39 percent of residents in rural areas lack access to basic broadband, which the FCC defines as 25 Mbps (megabits per second) download speeds and 3 Mbps upload speeds. Experts note that this definition is misleading, because those speeds are extremely slow compared with fiber-optic service, which can deliver data at speeds up to 1,000 Mbps.

“It’s like putting someone on the bike path when the rest of the country is on a major eight-lane highway. That’s a very small amount of data at a very low speed,” said Harvard University law professor Susan Crawford, referring to the FCC definition in an interview with *Vox.com* in January 2019.

Fiber optic carries data across thin glass wires inside a larger protective cable. The data is transferred via light signals, and the connection doesn’t require electricity to operate and has nearly unlimited capacity. Currently, some 25 percent of the United States has access to fiber, predominantly in densely populated urban areas.

In her book, *Fiber: The Coming Tech Revolution—and Why America Might Miss It*, Crawford argues the widespread lack of access to fiber networks is placing U.S. communities at an economic disadvantage. She points to nations, including China, South Korea, and Sweden, that have made it a national priority to create affordable fiber networks for their citizens. That compares with the United States, where telecommunication providers primarily offer slow, outdated technologies that are overpriced, particularly in rural areas. Crawford adds that federal and state policies have often stood in the way of fiber networks.

Nevertheless, Crawford and others emphasize that many rural towns are taking charge of their technological futures. Nationwide, more than 500 municipalities have invested in public networks, using innovative financing models to lower costs for residents when existing cable or telephone companies do not offer competitively priced services.

For example, a municipal electric utility in Chattanooga, Tennessee, paid for a broadband buildout as part of a new smart-grid initiative for the city that was enabled by a federal stimulus grant. The savings produced by the smart grid, plus revenue from access fees paid by the utility’s Internet access business, covered the financing and operating costs of the smart grid — and would have done so even if the utility had not received the grant, asserts a recent report from the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard.

Other municipalities have laid down broadband through cooperatives originally created to provide telephone and electrical service for rural communities that historically were not served by commercial providers.

Legal Barriers to Local Authority

Certain circumstances make it challenging for municipalities to take the approach that Leverett pursued.

Leverett benefited in part from its ability to connect to a regional network called MassBroadband 123, created by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, a state agency, which used a matching federal economic stimulus grant to finance an \$89.7 million “middle-mile” fiber-optic network. The project, completed in 2013, comprises 1,200 miles of fiber-optic infrastructure that includes Internet connections at more than 1,100 “community anchor institutions,” such as libraries, schools, stations, and government buildings, in 123 communities in western and central Massachusetts. Leverett funded the “last mile” connection to residents’ homes.



Credit: Chris Caserta

At least 39 percent of residents in rural areas lack access to basic broadband.



U.S. Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester (DE) (sixth from right) addresses state officials during the CSG/ERC rural broadband conference in Wilmington in April 2019.

Leverett was also aided by its ability to incorporate as a municipal light plant to sell telecommunications services, a right that does not exist in every state. In fact, more than half of U.S. states have laws that bar local authorities from building a municipal network, according to Next Century Cities. The organization estimates that more than 11 million Americans who do not have access to broadband — over half the country’s estimated unconnected population — live in states where municipal networks are banned by state legislation. In some states, providers have successfully lobbied state officials to approve legislation that creates legal barriers preventing towns from having authority.

“We’ve got to solve this problem in New England in these rural areas,” said Socia. “We can’t allow folks to have second-class access.”

There are financial hurdles for local governments, as well. Throughout the country, broadband technologies are primarily being deployed by the private sector. Tom Coverick, a managing director of KeyBank Capital Markets, said investors are reluctant to underwrite municipal broadband networks because they consider the investments unproven and risky.

“Telecom spooks our investors. They don’t view it as a utility yet. They’re not certain about the technology or the competition,” said Coverick during the April meeting.

His advice was that municipalities assume enough risk with a project to convince investors they have “skin in the game,” by offering assets other than network revenue as a backstop for a bond.

The Role of the Federal Government

Some experts, concerned that disparities in broadband access across American society could have adverse economic and social consequences for those left behind, assert that the federal government should play a more active role in addressing the digital divide.

Two primary federal vehicles direct money to fund broadband infrastructure: the broadband and telecommunications programs at the Rural Utilities Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Universal Service Fund programs under the FCC. The two agencies provide billions in funding each year for rural broadband, and in 2018 and 2019, Congress appropriated more than \$1 billion for the Rural Utilities Service to conduct a new broadband loan and grant pilot program, the ReConnect Program.

Sometimes, the agencies have agendas that are at odds with one another. In a column published in *The New York Times* in February 2019, Christopher Ali, an assistant professor at the University of Virginia, said the resulting lack of coordinated federal policies has enabled major telecommunications companies to receive



Credit: Rona Cohen

a large portion of federal funds with low regulatory accountability. Added to that are complex grant and loan stipulations that make it difficult for communities to apply for funding.

Ali and other observers cite the need for a single agency to coordinate federal expenditures, like the wildly successful Rural Electrification Administration, created in 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt to provide loans and grants to rural electric and telephone companies. Within 20 years of its establishment, the program had brought electricity to nearly every farm across America.

The Need for Improved Mapping

Nationwide, another challenge is lack of accurate data showing which communities are underserved.

The FCC is required by law to collect broadband information, and starting in 2019, the agency assumed responsibility for developing a comprehensive map of broadband access in the United States. The data is critical to local communities, because the FCC uses it to determine where to direct billions of dollars per year to deploy broadband in underserved areas. However, much of the current data has been criticized as incomplete or misleading.

For example, a unit of geography such as a census tract or a census block is considered “covered,” and ineligible for federal funding, if at least one business or residence in that area can obtain broadband.

“This is very problematic because the blocks vary so much in size,” said Brent Legg, vice president of government affairs at Connected Nation, a nonprofit that provides broadband mapping services for states and local communities. “There are eight blocks in the U.S. that are the size of Connecticut. In Alaska, one block is the size of New Jersey,” said Legg during the April conference.

Historically, the data has been self-reported by broadband service providers and not independently verified outside of the FCC. In response to public criticism, last August the FCC adopted a new process for collecting data. The process, expected to be implemented during a period of 12 to 18 months, would require broadband service providers to submit geospatial broadband coverage maps — which provide greater granularity than census blocks — indicating where fixed broadband service is actually made available. The new process would also implement a crowdsourcing mechanism for public feedback, as individual consumers likely know whether they have access to broadband, according to a report from the Congressional Research Service.

Going forward, the CSG/ERC Agriculture Committee will continue to track successes — and failures — in rural broadband expansion in the region, and connect members in underserved areas with experts who can offer suggestions for a path forward. ■

Pursuing Regional Approaches on the Road to a Low-Carbon Economy



Credit: LanaElova/Shutterstock.com.

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.

When Connecticut State Senator Gary Winfield considers how a new multistate effort to reduce vehicle emissions could truly benefit his community, his advice is to start by improving public transportation.

Winfield represents New Haven and West Haven, and many of his constituents cannot afford a car. When they travel, they depend on buses that are often slow and unreliable. It can take an hour and a half to get to a job at the nearby mall, compared with less than a half hour by car, he said.

“That means there’s something wrong with that transportation system,” said Winfield during a panel discussion organized by CSG/ERC’s Energy and Environment Committee at Yale University last October.

Connecticut is among 12 northeastern states participating in the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI), whose state agencies, together with officials from the District of Columbia, are working to devise a cap-and-invest program for tailpipe emissions. The intent is to transition the region’s transportation system toward electrification and dramatically lower climate-warming pollution from the transportation sector, the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions nationwide. The program is also expected to enhance public health and lead to new jobs in the clean-energy economy.

The panel discussion was held in conjunction with CSG/ERC’s Northeast Climate and Energy Summit, which was hosted by the Yale University School of Management and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. The dialogue provided Winfield and other legislators the opportunity to speak directly with state agency officials who are leading the TCI effort and offer suggestions for ways the program could be designed to provide tangible quality-of-life improvements for their constituents.



Credit: Connecticut Senate Democrats.

Connecticut State Senator
Gary Winfield

An Emphasis on Flexibility

TCI would limit emissions from the transportation sector and lower that limit, or cap, over time. Bulk fuel suppliers would hold an “allowance” for each ton of pollution they were responsible for. The allowances would be auctioned, and states would have the flexibility to invest the proceeds as they wished. The approach is modeled after the nine-state Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which has implemented a market-based system to reduce emissions from the electricity sector since 2009.

Since it took effect a decade ago, RGGI has reduced carbon emissions from the electricity sector by more than 50 percent in participating states, generated more than \$4 billion in net economic value through 2017, and led to the creation of 40,000 new jobs, according to research from the Analysis Group, a consulting firm. The proceeds have been invested in energy efficiency, renewable energy, direct bill assistance, and greenhouse gas abatement projects.

“Part of the reason why RGGI has persevered is that it leaves flexibility to the states wherever it can. It’s a powerful track record of success from RGGI that we are now looking to implement in the transportation sector,” said Katie Dykes, commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, during the conference.

Winfield said he hopes TCI’s final proposal will include realistic transportation options that will help communities like his. Many of his constituents would benefit from more reliable, cleaner public transportation services that improve air quality and cut down on commuting times, he said, and buying an electric vehicle is typically not an option.

“Even if we are giving them cash back for [the purchase of an electric] vehicle, they are not going to be able to get that vehicle we want them to get,” he said.

In a draft proposal released last October, participating states said TCI would prioritize issues around equity. Specifically, the program seeks to expand low-carbon and clean-mobility options in historically underserved communities or those heavily affected by transportation pollution.

TCI was soliciting feedback ahead of the release of a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) at the end of 2019. After considering further public input, TCI expects to release a final MOU in the spring of 2020.



Credit: AR Braver.

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont speaking during CSG/ERC's Northeast Climate and Energy Summit at Yale University in October 2019.

Each jurisdiction will then decide whether to sign and participate in the program.

The Importance of Collaboration

The conference at Yale was among a series of climate and energy summits organized by the CSG/ERC Energy and Environment Committee in recent years to help states explore ways to collectively benefit from the transition to a low-carbon economy. The event brought together more than 100 state officials and staff from northeastern states and eastern Canadian provinces, who also explored innovative solutions for reducing emissions in the electricity system, agriculture, buildings, and the waste management sector.

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“Part of the reason why RGGI has persevered is that it leaves flexibility to the states wherever it can. It’s a powerful track record of success from RGGI that we are now looking to implement in the transportation sector.”

**– Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

ETC Overseas: Exploring Germany's Dual-Education Model



Credit: Veronique Cavallier

Members pose for a photo at the Rudolph Wilde Platz in Berlin, the site of President John F. Kennedy's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech on June 26, 1963.

For years, Joan Dolan has searched for vocational training programs that offer youth a pathway to meaningful careers without the need for a college degree — careers that will hopefully keep them in Maine, her home state.

"Everybody is screaming for employees," said Dolan, who is director of apprenticeships and strategic partnerships at the Maine Department of Labor. "There is not an easy way right now to connect our youth to those employers."

With one-fifth of its residents above the age of 65, Maine has the oldest population in the nation. Despite a 3.5 percent unemployment rate, many young people leave the state after high school.

Dolan had heard that a few states facing similar challenges had partnered with companies to create apprenticeship programs based on Germany's dual-education model. The program trains high school students for skilled jobs and then transitions them into middle-class

careers. Dolan was intrigued by the program's success and durability, and when she learned that the Eastern Trade Council (ETC) was leading a delegation of two dozen northeastern state officials to Berlin to study the program, she was eager to join them.

The German system was created in 1969 through legislation known as the Vocational Training Act. The program, which is regulated by the federal government, pairs small and medium-sized companies with publicly funded vocational schools. It is primarily aimed at youth who are interested in entering the work force without attending college; apprentices can start training as early as age 15. Currently, about 500,000 students — half of all graduating high school seniors — enter directly into apprenticeships in lieu of pursuing higher education. Companies pay approximately three-quarters of the cost of the dual-education program, and the federal and state governments pick up the balance.

Last October, Dolan traveled to Berlin with officials

from six other states to see the program in action. Over the course of five days, ETC organized nearly two dozen meetings with representatives from federal, state, and city governments; national and regional chambers of commerce; trade associations; start-ups; small businesses; and incubators focusing on the life sciences and renewable-energy industries.

“I’ve always heard about the German model, but I really understand it now,” said Dolan. “My big takeaway was that they’ve got it figured out, and we should be applying it here as we can.”

Creating Alternative Pathways to Employment

Dolan said one of the benefits that struck her about Germany’s system is that it gives youth time to try out a potential career with little financial risk. Over a period of up to three years, apprentices spend three-quarters of their time training in the workplace; the rest of the time is devoted to classroom instruction at a vocational school. The classes include coursework focused on a particular industry, but participants are also required to take subjects to broaden their overall education, including courses in political science and communication.

During the program, apprentices are mentored by experienced employees at a company and receive a paycheck equal to one-third of the pay they would earn working in a full-time position. Graduates are awarded a journeyman certificate and then typically go straight into a full-time job, either at the company where they trained or at another firm within the same industry. Others travel or go on to college to get more experience in their chosen field.

Dolan said she was surprised to learn about the robust opportunities offered to youth in Germany, where the average age of an apprentice is 19. There were few parallels in Maine, where most apprenticeships are unionized and only available to union members. Typically, the programs are not open to entry-level employees; the average age of an apprentice in Maine is 30. For high school graduates looking for an alternative to college, the only option is often a low-wage, dead-end job that will not lead to a viable career, at least in the near term.

“We send our kids to college and say, ‘Go figure yourselves out and incur \$200,000 in debt,’” said Dolan. “I think everybody should have an occupation that can allow them to earn a livable wage, but college isn’t always the answer.”

Based in part on what Dolan learned in Berlin, her agency has contacted a technical high school about



Credit: Veronique Cavallier

Members visiting the HySPRINT Lab, a major renewable energy research hub owned by the Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin Corporation.

developing a registered apprenticeship program to train students to become automotive technicians. Currently, the high school has an agreement with a local community college, which offers students coursework that counts for one year toward a two-year degree. Once students graduate, they tend to go straight to work without completing the final year of study. Her hope is to create a new program that will enable students to get hired after the first year but require that they complete the degree to stay employed. Ultimately, getting the two-year associate’s degree will create more options for those students down the road. And as in Germany, attending classes at the community college would be free.

“I am definitely taking what I learned there and weaving it in with what I hope will be a robust youth apprenticeship program in Maine,” said Dolan. “We’re trying to create an alternative pathway to a stable, fulfilling career with growth opportunities.”

No Silver Bullet

Of course, part of the challenge lies in persuading employers to create programs to attract young workers. The dilemma is not unique to Maine. Within seven years, more than 15 other states will have at least one-fifth of their population beyond retirement age, including four in the Northeast: Delaware, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.

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Sharpen Your Skills

The Robert J. Thompson Eastern Leadership Academy (ELA) offers officials and staff from all three branches of state and provincial government a unique opportunity to hone their leadership and communication skills and network with colleagues from the Eastern region.

Located in the heart of Philadelphia, and working in cooperation with the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government, the unique five-day program includes workshops and hands-on training with experts from academia as well as the public and private sectors. ELA offers strategies tailored to the challenges facing public officials every day, in areas including resolving conflicts, fostering civil discourse, and mastering social media and branding, in a focused setting that promotes experiential learning.

ELA is designed to help you:

- **Develop leadership skills.** Through a series of hands-on group workshops ranging from consensus building to media relations, ELA provides training to sharpen and develop the skills you need to become an effective leader.
- **Improve your understanding of key regional issues.** ELA is the only leadership academy designed exclusively for Eastern regional officials from all three branches. Scholars from the Fels Institute of Government and outside experts provide a context for you to effectively evaluate information, communicate your message successfully with constituents and colleagues, and develop strategies for relating to the media and the public.
- **Network with the best and brightest.** ELA convenes some of the most promising state officials from across the region to share knowledge and to learn from one another's experiences.



Eastern Leadership Academy Class of 2019

What graduates are saying about ELA:

"This was the most valuable conference I've ever attended."

Rafah DiCostanzo, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Nova Scotia

"This was both an inspirational experience and a reminder of why I love public service."

Brittany Rodas, Research Analyst, Pennsylvania Legislature

"You walk in the first day as complete strangers and leave as connected friends. It's an awesome way to learn about other legislatures and political processes across the Eastern Region."

Ashely McMann, Supervising Legislative Outreach Coordinator, Connecticut

"It was incredible to be at a place with political people where party affiliation is irrelevant, trust is established, and you can open up about the issues."

Will Bouma, Member of Provincial Parliament, Ontario

"I am not new to elected office, but I absolutely learned new and valuable information at each session every day during ELA 2019."

Senator Melony Griffith, Maryland

Photo Credit: Scott Spitzer Photography

From the ELA 2019 Class President: Dylan McDowell

I was fresh off the elevator, coffee in hand, shirt a little too unwrinkled as I walked around the 11th floor of the Carvel State Building on my first day working for the Delaware State Senate. I was struck, first and foremost, by how few people there were. Surely, my state's legislature needed more than a half-empty floor of staffers to stay afloat, right?

But, just two years later, I now know that we can make a whole branch of state government run with just 62 legislators and a roughly equal number of staffers to support them. Bills are researched, drafted, debated, and passed; potholes are filled; task forces are assembled; and the business of the people gets done, year after year. The people who make that happen are some of the greatest I've ever met.

I arrived at this year's Eastern Leadership Academy eager to find out if this held true for other states in our region.

Not only wasn't I disappointed, I was really blown away. The people I met at ELA 2019 are stunningly talented and intelligent, and they taught me more in just three short days together than I could have ever expected to learn on my own. They are men and women who entered public service not for the fame (and definitely not for the money), but because they believe fervently

in good government and want to do something — anything — to improve the lives of their neighbors. From the Virgin Islands to the Eastern Canadian Provinces, constituents benefit from their dedication and ability every day.



Photo Credit: Scott Spitzer Photography

Bringing these people together is a small but powerful thing.

And that is what the ELA does so well. Our group of around 30 elected officials and staff got to share best practices, compare notes, and learn new skills. Perhaps even more importantly, we got to step out of an arena that prominently features bitter partisanship, mountains of hate mail, armies of social media trolls, and a disproportionate amount of anger and spite into a much smaller one that not only understood these struggles but shared in them.

Beyond the invaluable training and networking that ELA offers its participants lies something potentially more valuable: a few days to engage and befriend the only other people crazy enough to dive directly into the grinding gears and pistons of government and shoulder the burden of making it all work. It is a rare opportunity for the consistently overworked to hit the pause button, exchange notes, and renew faith in what we do and why we do it.

On the page opposite this one, there is, no doubt, a brief explainer on the skills sessions and opportunities offered at the Eastern Leadership Academy. But let me also add, between those lines, that the friendship and camaraderie that class after class of ELA participants find in Philadelphia every August is also important. Building a fraternity of leaders in state government is a mission that I believe can lead to better policy, more cooperation within and across state lines, higher morale, and stronger democracies. For many of us and for many of you, that journey began at the Eastern Leadership Academy, and it will continue for many years to come.

Dylan McDowell is the deputy communications director for the Delaware State Senate Democratic Caucus. He was elected class president by the ELA class of 2019.



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**Fels Institute
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Confronting Issues Around Race, and Racism, in the Statehouse



Credit: David Bette

Interior dome, Rhode Island Statehouse

When Michael Coard considers how he ended up pursuing a career in law instead of a life in crime, he points to a pivotal event in third grade: the day when he “got lucky” and scored high on a citywide test.

That achievement led to admission at a top Philadelphia school, which set Coard on the path to college and law school. Most of the classmates that he left behind in his North Philadelphia community were not so fortunate. Instead of gaining the tools they needed to build a meaningful career, they received an inadequate education that failed to prepare them for college, the working world, or life in general, said Coard.

Some ended up becoming his clients. For nearly three decades, Coard has represented people from his community and others like it who are charged with capital murder. Their trajectory reflects the experience of young people across the country who attend under-resourced schools in predominantly black neighborhoods and end up in the criminal justice system, he said.

“Most of my clients who shoot and kill people would be sitting right here if they had the opportunity I did,” said Coard, speaking at a meeting of CSG/ERC’s Council on Communities of Color last August. “It’s not the young black men that are the problem; it’s the system that creates them. If you give eight out of ten of my clients an education, they wouldn’t be my client.”

The discussion, which was held in conjunction with

the CSG/ERC 2019 Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, was one of two gatherings organized by the council last year to explore the historical culture of racism in American life and the need for more conversations on racial justice and equity within state government.

Coard said the lack of educational options in underserved communities is one example of state-sanctioned oppression that has persisted for hundreds of years. “It’s not like in 1865 blacks got their freedom,” he said, referring to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which put an official end to slavery. There were decades of violence and discrimination enabled by the Black Codes from 1865 to 1866; the Redemption period following Reconstruction, from the late 1860s to the late 1870s; and the Jim Crow era, which lasted until 1965, a year after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, said Coard.

One of the manifestations of this continued discrimination is the racialization of public spaces, in which people make 911 calls for simply feeling uncomfortable in the presence of people of color, said Coard. The council has been examining incidents of unnecessary 911 calls, and exploring strategies to prevent them, to improve the safety of people of color.

Coard described a legal tool in Pennsylvania that he believes could serve as a potential solution. The law permits individuals to file a private criminal complaint

against another person — in this case, against the person who called 911 — before a district judge. The individual bringing the complaint must show that the charge meets a specific standard of proof and is approved by the district attorney.

Confronting Racism in State Legislatures

Across the Northeast, state lawmakers admit that they are challenged by issues of race, racism, and racial justice. During the meeting, members examined how race influences the work of elected officials of color in the statehouse — and how their experiences diverge from those of their white colleagues.

“Doesn’t it make you feel a little uncomfortable to talk about race?” Rhode Island State Representative Raymond Hull asked the dozens of legislators from the region who joined the meeting. “If I single you out for being white, it’s because I love you,” said Hull, looking around the room. “It’s because I need to work with you, because you hold a lot more cards than I do.”

Hull said one of the biggest struggles among his colleagues of color is ensuring that they are allowed to express their views openly in the statehouse. “I want to be heard,” he said. Hull recalled growing angry during Black History Month, when a legislator who was speaking on the House floor suddenly had his time cut short, with no explanation.

Former Vermont State Representative Kiah Morris shared her story of being admonished for quietly leaving the legislature’s chamber when a House colleague referred to a Black Lives Matter resolution in a way that was offensive to her. When another representative rose to speak in support of the resolution, white members who opposed it turned their chairs so that their backs faced the speaker, but they were not reprimanded.

“The rules were clearly different,” said Morris.

Later, Morris received online threats from white supremacists who opposed a legislative gun reform package, even though she was not a sponsor of the bills.

“These are dynamics that silence good legislators of color and stymie equal access to power in legislatures,” said Morris.

Morris and other participants said that the lack of a level playing field will persist until there are more elected officials of color in legislatures across the country to lend a voice to the needs of their communities.

“We will not be able to address racism because we can’t have conversations about it — because we are unwilling or unable to separate white people from



Michael Coard, Attorney and Adjunct Professor, Temple University; Kiah Morris, former Vermont State Representative

whiteness, which is the standard,” said Connecticut Superior Court Judge Erika Tindill.

Nova Scotia MLA Tony Ince said there is a deep need to have those difficult conversations in Canada, where black people are underrepresented in political and cultural life. Black communities have existed in Nova Scotia for 400 years, but most people are not aware of that history, since it is not taught in schools, said Ince, who serves as minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

“There’s an old African proverb, ‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,’” said Ince. “We need to go together.” ■



Connecticut Superior Court Judge Erika Tindill

States Get Proactive on Transportation Infrastructure Spending



Credit: Shutterstock.com

States are exploring innovative funding strategies to upgrade the region's roads and bridges.

During the spring of 2019, Maine transportation officials planning to make \$59 million in road and bridge improvements suddenly hit a familiar barrier: lack of funds.

After receiving three bids for a dozen projects that came in more than 40 percent above the expected budget, officials had to cancel the work. A shortage of skilled labor and high material costs contributed to the exorbitant bids, which took officials by surprise.

“If you asked me back in January if I would have been talking about canceling a lot of work, I would have said no,” Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note told the *Portland Press Herald* when the decision to abandon the projects was announced last May.

While the sudden spike in highway construction costs was unexpected, finding ways to afford critical upgrades to the region's aging infrastructure has become a recurring challenge for state and local government leaders.

Part of the challenge stems from the decline in federal fuel tax collections, which are the primary source of funding for highway and bridge infrastructure. The tax was not designed to keep pace with inflation; since 1993, the federal excise tax has remained unchanged, at 18.4 cents per gallon of gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon of diesel fuel. Its current value is around 40 percent of what it could buy in transportation improvements in 1993.

In addition, the taxes have become less reliable as automakers produce more fuel-efficient vehicles and introduce electric models, leading drivers to buy less gasoline. These are among the reasons why federal infrastructure investment, as measured as a percentage of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, has dropped over time.

Alternatives to Taxes

In recent years, proposals to raise the federal gas tax have consistently hit a dead end. Last summer, the prospect of higher federal fuel taxes was floated amid discussions around a major federal infrastructure bill that did not materialize. Other proposals included enlisting private sector investment in infrastructure upgrades and paying for upgrades through tolls or other user fees.

In the face of persistent federal inaction, the most common way for states to raise funds has been by increasing the state fuel tax; since 2013, 31 states have done so. Among them is Vermont, where in 2013, lawmakers approved a 6.5 cent increase to collect enough revenue to qualify for matching federal interstate construction funds. By law, the federal government contributes 90 percent of the cost of a project covered by those funds, and states must raise the remaining 10 percent. In an interview in October 2019, Vermont

State Representative Patrick Brennan said the decision to increase the tax was a short-term solution; he was skeptical that voters would currently support another tax increase.

“That was a heavy lift for us,” said Brennan. “I think before we go back to that well, we are going to be looking for other federal solutions.”

As chair of the CSG/ERC Transportation Policy Committee, Brennan has worked with his colleagues from the Northeast to explore alternative funding and financing opportunities. The committee has submitted testimony to Congress and sent resolutions to congressional representatives urging increased investment in the region’s transportation system. In all of these efforts, the committee’s goal is to help lawmakers forge a long-term solution, said Brennan.

Pennsylvania State Senator Kim Ward, who serves as vice chair of the CSG/ERC Transportation Policy Committee, said Congress should consider alternatives to raising the federal gas tax, such as granting states more flexibility to finance federal-aid highways and providing states with incentives to establish public-private partnerships. She also called on Congress to reduce unfunded federal mandates and to embrace a national vision for a long-term policy that would charge drivers a user fee based on vehicle miles traveled.

Ward, who chairs the Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee, is promoting innovative funding strategies for transportation infrastructure in the state and at the national level. “Gas taxes are not the answer as a sustainable source of funding, due to the current and future trends of alternative-fuel vehicles and more efficient vehicles using our roadways,” said Ward.

The Keystone State has more state-maintained roads than New York, New Jersey, and New England combined, and the third-largest state-maintained bridge system in the nation. Residents already pay the second-highest gas tax in the country from a 2013 multimodal investment plan, but the state continues to face funding challenges to support critical upgrades on its extensive transportation network. The state’s top funding challenges are declining gas tax revenues from alternative-fuel vehicles and more efficient vehicles, diverting money toward the state police from the Motor License Fund, and rising material costs, said Ward.

In Maine, which last increased its state gas tax in 2011, policymakers are exploring a number of options to resolve their persistent funding shortfalls. In recent years, the state has relied on some \$100 million in annual bond issuances to maintain and repair highways and bridges,



“Gas taxes are not the answer as a sustainable source of funding.”

– Pennsylvania State Senator Kim Ward

and there is growing frustration with that practice, said Maine State Representative Andrew McLean, who chairs the Joint Transportation Committee.

“This is no way to fund our transportation,” said McLean. One of the consequences of bonding is that it pushes out other investments, like funding for higher education, he added.

McLean is chairing a recently formed bipartisan blue-ribbon commission, which has been holding a series of public meetings to educate lawmakers and the public about the magnitude of the funding crisis and to consider long-term, sustainable solutions.

The 15-member commission includes state and local officials; representatives from trucking, construction, and railroad industries; and members of advocacy groups. The commission will have the ability to draft and report out a bill, said McLean.

The group is looking at a number of policy options, including creating a sales tax on transportation items, increased highway tolling, fees for hybrids and electric vehicles, and allocating a larger contribution from the state’s general fund, said McLean. “Nothing is off the table,” he added.

McLean was among the national and regional transportation leaders who attended a special CSG/ERC Transportation Policy Committee meeting convened by Brennan in New York City last November. Committee members explored potential funding and financing solutions, such as mileage-based user fees and other innovative programs that could provide much-needed resources to close the funding gap and increase investment in a safe and efficient transportation system.

“CSG has been really terrific with providing resources, and also connecting transportation leaders in different states,” said McLean. “The networking and the camaraderie that come along with these events and those who work for CSG has been invaluable.” ■

Responding to the Alarming Rise in Maternal Mortality



Credit: Sebastian Marquez Velaz

Health care panel participants during CSG/ERC's 2019 Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh. From left: Lucy Hodder, J.D., Professor, University of New Hampshire School of Law; Tekisha Everette, Ph.D., Executive Director, Health Equity Solutions; Stacy Beck, M.D., Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh.

Last August, members of the CSG/ERC Health Policy Committee gathered to discuss a startling fact about maternal health: More women die from pregnancy-related complications in the United States than in any other developed country, and the number of expectant mothers who die in childbirth is on the rise.

The group met with doctors, nurses, and state policymakers, who pointed to a range of factors contributing to the dangers for pregnant women, including lack of access to health care in rural communities as well as implicit bias and racism in the health care system.

"This work actually keeps me up at night, because I'm a mother myself," said Lisa Asare, assistant commissioner for the New Jersey Division of Family Health, who participated in a panel discussion during CSG/ERC's 2019 Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh.

As maternal mortality rates have increased in the United States, they have declined in other industrialized nations. According to a study in *The Lancet*, the maternal mortality rate in the United States in 2015 (26.4 deaths per 100,000 live births) was nearly three times higher than Britain's and seven times higher than in Denmark or Finland. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that about 700

women in the United States die from pregnancy-related complications each year, and alarmingly, 60 percent of these deaths could have been prevented. These statistics, along with recent, well-publicized experiences of several high-profile women who encountered life-threatening complications during childbirth — like Serena Williams — have forced policymakers to address this crisis, particularly among communities of color and rural communities.

Asare said that she works on multiple fronts to improve health outcomes in New Jersey, including empowering patients to seek medical help for conditions that could be life-threatening and improving the level of care that hospitals provide to pregnant women. For example, health care practitioners know that some of the leading causes of maternal mortality are hemorrhages and sepsis, but not every hospital has concrete protocols in place to deal with those conditions, said Asare.

Maternal Mortality Review Committees

One promising tool that has helped Asare and other health care professionals is state-based maternal mortality review committees (MMRCs). MMRCs are expert

panels that investigate and review individual maternal deaths, then make recommendations and present actionable guidelines for community providers to prevent such tragedies. One of the most successful MMRCs is the California Maternal Quality Care Collaborative, an initiative begun in 2006 that helped California reduce its maternal mortality rates to a historic low today.

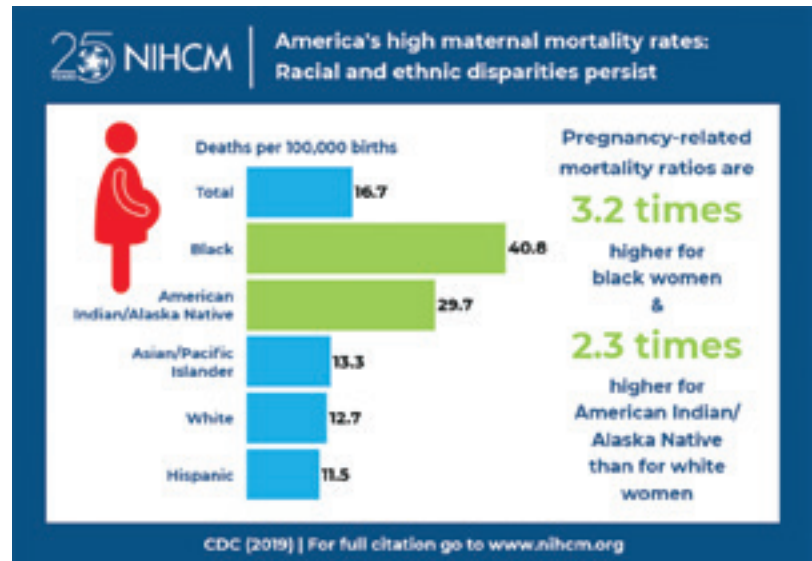
In 2018, Congress passed the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act, which created a grant program at the CDC to encourage states to adopt MMRCs or revitalize existing ones. In August 2019, the CDC awarded its first round of funding to support MMRCs in 25 states — including ERC member states Connecticut, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

In Pennsylvania, simply accessing care during pregnancy has become a challenge in many communities, given a steady wave of closures among hospital obstetric units in recent years. From 2004 to 2014, nearly one-quarter of obstetric units across the state closed, according to figures from the state Department of Health, due to high maintenance costs and staffing shortages. It is not uncommon for women, particularly in rural areas, to have to drive up to four hours to receive maternal care, said Stacy Beck, an assistant professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. Studies have shown a relationship between distance to obstetric care and poor medical outcomes. This problem is affecting rural communities across the country.

In fact, one of the biggest challenges for women everywhere is a persistent lack of access to even primary care. “In the United States, the majority of women only receive health care when they are pregnant, so a whole range of problems go unnoticed, like diabetes, and then we only have 10 months to try to fix those problems,” said Beck during the panel discussion in Pittsburgh. “As a physician, I often feel helpless.”

Breaking Down the Data

As chair of Pennsylvania’s recently formed MMRC, Beck is leading an effort to take a “systems-based approach” to determine which communities are most affected by poor care. Data is critical to understanding the “big picture” of maternal care — what is affecting women in every community of a state. But compiling data takes time. Beck’s team is reliant on doctors and coroners for medical records, which they can be reluctant to turn over. “For the first year of our maternal



Source: CDC, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths – United States, 2007-2016.

mortality committee, I felt like we were going around and begging people to release their data to us,” said Beck.

Once the data is collected, it is critical to break it down, to understand the subpopulations that fare the worst, said Tekisha Everette, executive director for Connecticut-based Health Equity Solutions, a nonprofit that promotes policies to advance health equity.

Connecticut is considered to be among the states with the best overall quality of health care, but it also has one of the highest levels of health disparities, said Everette during the panel discussion. Black women and Native American women in Connecticut are faring four to five times worse in maternal mortality outcomes than white and Latina women, she said.

Last year, Everette’s organization supported a Connecticut bill that would have given women in low-income communities better access to doulas, who assist women throughout their pregnancies and advocate for their health. Data shows that doula-assisted women are two times less likely to have a birth complication and four times less likely to have an underweight baby, said Everette. The bill, which failed to pass, would have created a state certification program for doulas and enabled them to get Medicaid reimbursements, as is done in Rhode Island and New Jersey. Minnesota, New York, and Oregon also provide Medicaid reimbursement for doulas.

Currently, a Connecticut state task force is exploring options for regulating and supporting doulas, with the

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 9

In a brief address during the conference, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont emphasized the need for a state like Connecticut, which is heavily reliant on natural gas imports from outside the region, to collaborate with its neighbors as it seeks to reduce harmful transportation pollution along the Interstate 95 corridor and promote an offshore wind sector. “All of our issues don’t stop at the border,” said Lamont.

Earlier in the year, Lamont signed a bill calling for Connecticut to have a carbon-free electric grid by 2040. That came on the heels of historic state legislation in New York setting the same 2040 target for zero-carbon grid power and a goal of reaching carbon neutrality from all sectors of the economy by 2050. A number of other states, including Maine, are aiming to get all of their power from zero-carbon sources by midcentury and to accelerate their carbon reduction goals.

Offshore wind figures prominently in policymakers’ plans to reduce the region’s reliance on fossil fuels. Northeastern states have collectively pledged to develop more than 17,000 megawatts of ocean-based wind energy within the next 15 years, and some 25,000 megawatts are already in various stages of development off the East Coast.

Developing abundant sources of zero-emission power will be critical to reducing pollution from transportation through TCI, as drivers increasingly opt for vehicles powered by electricity instead of petroleum.

During the conference, members suggested other areas that would benefit from close collaboration among states, including efforts to sequester carbon through agricultural and forestry practices.

“It was one of the most productive conferences I’ve attended,” said Vermont State Representative Mike Mrowicki. “Within the time we shared, each part was informative, accessible, timely, and will help me do the work I was elected to do in the arena of climate issues.”

The Energy and Environment Committee plans to host meetings and workshops during the course of 2020 to help officials accelerate the development of transformative policies.

“We are on the cusp of a sustainability revolution that will create hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs in the region and in the nation — as long as we stick together and do what needs to be done,” said Massachusetts State Senator Marc Pacheco, who is co-chair of the CSG/ERC Energy and Environment Committee. “This is one of those rare opportunities where what we do today will truly have an impact on generations to come.” ■

Addressing the Student Debt Crisis

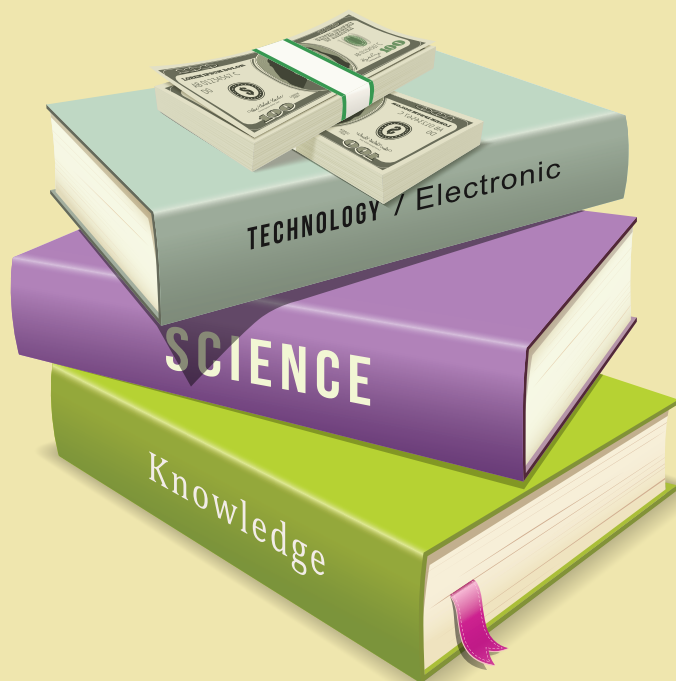
Across the nation, the student debt crisis has reached staggering proportions.

A 2018 analysis by the Brookings Institution suggests that nearly 40 percent of student borrowers are at risk of defaulting on their loans by 2023.

Student loan debt is “a constant stress in the lives of our constituents. It is an issue that cuts across demographic and geographic lines,” said Delaware State Senator Ernesto Lopez, chair of the CSG/ERC Education Committee.

As of the second quarter of 2019, national student loan debt stood at \$1.48 trillion, with 10.8 percent of that debt more than 90 days delinquent or in default, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The average student loan debt for borrowers in the ERC states was \$33,340, above the national average of \$28,523, data from the first quarter of 2019 shows.

Lopez cited the need for new student borrower funding formulas that are “equitable and fair.” During the course of 2020, Lopez said, the committee would be “engaged and active in sharing meaningful policy improvements” as states explore innovative solutions to the student debt crisis.





The State of Student Debt

State	Average Student Loan Debt	Student Loan Debt Per Capita	Percent of Student Loan Debt 90+ Days Delinquent
Alabama	\$31,899	\$4,920.00	15.17%
Alaska	\$25,682	\$4,030.00	9.38%
Arizona	\$23,967	\$5,170.00	14.37%
Arkansas	\$26,799	\$4,330.00	12.64%
California	\$22,785	\$4,530.00	9.44%
Colorado	\$26,530	\$6,180.00	10.56%
Connecticut	\$38,510	\$5,890.00	9.71%
Delaware	\$34,144	\$6,040.00	10.35%
District of Columbia	\$30,775	\$13,120.00	8.54%
Florida	\$24,041	\$4,940.00	13.65%
Georgia	\$28,653	\$7,250.00	13.09%
Hawaii	\$25,125	\$3,780.00	9.15%
Idaho	\$26,675	\$5,050.00	11.59%
Illinois	\$29,214	\$5,800.00	9.65%
Indiana	\$29,561	\$5,300.00	13.95%
Iowa	\$29,859	\$5,300.00	12.60%
Kansas	\$27,720	\$5,480.00	13.11%
Kentucky	\$28,477	\$4,870.00	16.00%
Louisiana	\$27,210	\$5,360.00	15.20%
Maine	\$31,364	\$5,340.00	9.91%
Maryland	\$29,314	\$6,740.00	10.37%
Massachusetts	\$32,065	\$6,140.00	7.58%
Michigan	\$31,289	\$5,800.00	12.23%
Minnesota	\$31,734	\$6,280.00	9.26%
Mississippi	\$30,439	\$5,800.00	12.23%
Missouri	\$27,108	\$5,270.00	12.63%
Montana	\$28,466	\$4,670.00	10.49%
Nebraska	\$25,750	\$5,080.00	9.24%
Nevada	\$22,064	\$4,170.00	14.27%
New Hampshire	\$34,415	\$5,860.00	8.00%
New Jersey	\$32,247	\$6,090.00	8.57%
New Mexico	\$21,237	\$4,070.00	15.21%
New York	\$30,931	\$6,090.00	8.61%
North Carolina	\$26,526	\$5,240.00	10.42%
North Dakota	\$27,400	\$5,510.00	8.54%
Ohio	\$30,629	\$6,220.00	13.31%
Oklahoma	\$25,952	\$4,540.00	15.63%
Oregon	\$27,885	\$5,760.00	11.67%
Pennsylvania	\$36,854	\$6,210.00	10.60%
Rhode Island	\$36,250	\$5,390.00	10.40%
South Carolina	\$30,891	\$5,870.00	13.13%
South Dakota	\$31,275	\$5,170.00	9.87%
Tennessee	\$25,252	\$5,050.00	13.86%
Texas	\$26,824	\$4,970.00	13.75%
Utah	\$18,838	\$4,350.00	8.48%
Vermont	\$30,651	\$5,480.00	7.90%
Virginia	\$29,887	\$5,820.00	9.70%
Washington	\$23,936	\$4,270.00	8.79%
West Virginia	\$27,505	\$4,020.00	18.01%
Wisconsin	\$29,569	\$4,850.00	8.57%
Wyoming	\$22,524	\$3,610.00	11.41%

NAT. AVG. | \$28,523 | \$5,432.75 | 11.39%

IN Q1 OF 2019:



10.85%
of student loans were
90+ days delinquent



9.54%
of loans in good standing
became newly 30+ days
delinquent.



9.42%
of loans delinquent 30+
days became seriously
delinquent (90+ days).

18.01%

WEST VIRGINIA
has the highest
percentage
of **Student
Loan Debt
90+ Days
Delinquent**

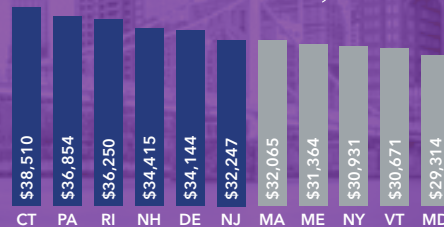
GEORGIA
has the highest
average
**Student Loan
Debt Per Capita**

\$7,250

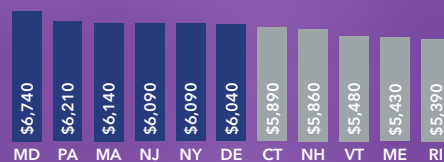
EASTERN REGION



AVERAGE ERC STUDENT DEBT **\$33,340**



\$5,933.64 AVG. ERC STUDENT DEBT PER CAPITA



AVG. % OF ERC STUDENT DEBT 90+ DAYS DELINQUENT **9.27%**

10.60% <i>Pennsylvania</i>	9.91% <i>Maine</i>	8.00% <i>New Hampshire</i>
10.40% <i>Rhode Island</i>	9.71% <i>Connecticut</i>	7.90% <i>Vermont</i>
10.37% <i>Maryland</i>	8.61% <i>New York</i>	7.58% <i>Massachusetts</i>
10.35% <i>Delaware</i>	8.57% <i>New Jersey</i>	

Planning for the Safe Passage, and Storage, of the Region's Nuclear Waste



Credit: U.S. Department of Energy

A cask carrying spent nuclear fuel from the West Valley Demonstration Plant in New York state to Idaho National Laboratory.

Last October, more than two dozen northeastern state and tribal leaders gathered in New Mexico to discuss a plan that could represent a near-term solution to a protracted environmental challenge: finding a home for the nation's nuclear waste.

The group met with an official from Lea County, New Mexico, which has offered to host an interim spent fuel storage site proposed by Holtec International, a private U.S. company, in the New Mexican desert, some 35 miles outside of Carlsbad. If the project receives federal approval, the facility could store large quantities of spent fuel from sites across the country for decades to come.

The visit was sponsored by CSG/ERC's affiliate organization, the Northeast High-Level Radioactive Waste Transportation Project, which is keeping a close watch on the Holtec proposal and a similar one located nearby, on the Texas border. If and when officials designate an interim storage site or a long-term repository, the organization will play a critical coordinating role.

"We don't have a storage site right now, but site-specific planning is really important, because removing spent nuclear fuel from a plant is not easy — and it will take decades," said Project Director Uldis Vanags. The

organization collaborates with state and community leaders in the Northeast to develop plans to safely transport spent fuel along the region's roads and railways.

In New Mexico, many local officials welcome the economic benefits that the county would reap from the Holtec proposal through tax revenues and jobs, but there is also opposition from some officials, residents, and environmental groups concerned about potential safety risks and legal issues associated with the transport of spent fuel.

A Long Impasse

Such concerns are not new. The challenge of finding a repository for the nation's nuclear waste has existed since the first U.S. reactor went online more than six decades ago.

Legislation enacted in 1982 directed the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to investigate possible long-term storage sites for the nation's spent nuclear fuel and high-level waste. Five years later, the government identified Yucca Mountain in Nevada as a potential repository, but the project was canceled by the Barack Obama administration in 2009 after prolonged legal chal-

lenges. Since then, there has been no agreement between Congress and the administration on a path forward.

Meanwhile, the waste continues to proliferate. U.S. commercial reactors have produced nearly 80,000 metric tons of waste, enough to fill a football field 20 meters deep. Currently, the spent fuel is stored in pools or dry casks in 80 sites across 35 states. The waste is located at operating reactors and at plants that have shut down, have been decommissioned, and no longer even have a reactor — all that's left is the spent fuel. There is also high-level waste left over from the nuclear weapons program in need of a permanent storage site.

As the waste grows, the expense of storing it rises, too. Utilities are suing the DOE for the cost of stockpiling the waste at their reactors since 1998, the year that the department defaulted on a contract to begin removing it from plants nationwide. The federal government had already paid out more than \$6 billion in settlements and court judgments as of the end of fiscal year 2016, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and that expense is expected to cost \$500 million a year going forward.

Even if Yucca Mountain were back on the table, it would be decades before shipments could begin, said Vanags. And if the project remains dead, he estimates that it would take 40 years to identify a new repository and begin sending waste there. Having an interim storage site is considered essential.

The Importance of Planning

Vanags and his colleagues regularly meet with community leaders in the Northeast who would be responsible for overseeing waste shipments in their jurisdictions, including state and tribal leaders, local officials, public safety experts, and first responders.

Together with DOE officials, they assess the infrastructure around plants to identify railroads, highways, bridges, barge inlets, and other routes that could be used during the transport of spent nuclear fuel from the sites.

Planning is important because in many cases, much of the infrastructure around the plants has changed since they were built four or five decades ago. For example, officials assess whether existing roads can handle heavy-haul trucks carrying casks that can weigh up to 480,000 pounds. If the plan is to put some of the casks on barges, they need to determine if the waterway needs dredging.

"If there's dredging required, that's a complex deal. The permits that would be needed can take years," said Vanags.



Credit: Udis Vanags

Members of the Northeast High-Level Radioactive Waste Transportation Project during a tour of the U.S. Department of Energy Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

Sometimes roads have been removed to make way for new development, and in many areas, the population has swelled. Earlier this year, the group visited the Oyster Creek plant, located on the shore of Barnegat Bay, near Long Beach Island, New Jersey, a popular summer vacation spot. The plant shut down in September 2018. Any waste shipments from the plant would need to halt during the summer months to avoid backing up roads already busy with beachgoers, said Vanags.

"These are all the things that are evaluated so that when a storage site becomes available, community leaders will have all the information they need to begin safe shipments," Vanags said.

The group also met with the chief selectman of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and briefed him on their planning efforts for the eventual transport of spent fuel from the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, which shut down in May 2019. The group was invited to return in 2020 to educate the public about its work.

In preparation for the eventual rail transport of high-level waste, the Department of Energy is designing and testing a special rail car, called Atlas, that can carry massively heavy casks filled with spent fuel. Atlas will be built to the same specification that is currently used by the U.S. Navy for transporting spent fuel from nuclear-powered naval vessels. A prototype is currently undergoing testing, and the DOE is working with states and tribes to develop an inspection protocol for it, said Vanags.

Holtec's proposed interim storage facility in New Mexico is currently under review by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, with a decision expected next year. If the project is approved, operations could begin as early as 2023. ■

The 2019 CSG/ERC Annual Meeting



Audience members during the opening plenary of the CSG/ERC 2019 Annual Meeting, which featured a discussion on "The Future of Work: Robots, AI, and Automation."

The CSG/ERC Annual Meeting is the largest regional gathering of state and Canadian provincial government leaders in the Northeast, attracting several hundred participants. Our members work in all three branches of government and together with senior representatives from the corporate community and academia, they meet to discuss emerging policy issues in an engaging, nonpartisan environment.

Our policy workshops are tailored to address issues that our members care about. They also offer ample opportunity to interact with speakers and colleagues, providing participants with rewarding networking opportunities.

For more information, visit us at www.csg-erc.org.

All photos by Sebastian Marquez Velez



CSG/ERC 2019 Co-Chairs, from left: Pennsylvania State Representative Ryan Mackenzie; Pennsylvania State Senator Joe Scarnati, President Pro Tempore. Far left: Rhode Island State Representative Marvin Abney.



From left: Maryland State Delegate Adrienne Jones, Speaker of the House; Maryland State Treasurer Nancy Kopp; George Norfleet, Director, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development.



New Hampshire State Senator Lou D'Allesandro, 2019 CSG National Chair.



Maryland State Senator Mike Miller, former Senate President, recipient of the 2019 CSG/ERC Paul White Award.



From left: Phyllis Yaffe, Consul General, Consulate General of Canada in New York; Ontario MPP Ted Arnott, Speaker, Legislative Assembly of Ontario; Québec MNA Guy Ouellette.



From left: U.S. Virgin Islands Senator Myron Jackson; Puerto Rico Senator Carmelo Ríos.



From left: Erwin Tan, M.D., Director of Thought Leadership, AARP; Deborah Faulkner, Interim Vice President of Medicare/Medicaid Program, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island; Shane Nugent, Vice President, The Nugent Group; Patience Moyo, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Brown University School of Public Health.



From left: New Hampshire State Representative Lucy Weber, Speaker Pro Tempore and 2020 ERC Co-Chair; New Hampshire State Representative Suzanne Smith.

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Vermont State Senator Alison Clarkson, who joined Dolan on the trip, estimates Vermont currently lacks at least 10,000 skilled workers to fill open jobs in various professions. The shortage has forced companies to cast a wide net in search of qualified candidates — a situation that has created a silver lining for some workers whom companies may have passed over in the past, like ex-offenders.

“Employers are looking at groups of employees they never thought they’d consider. And they’re finding that these people are good workers,” said Clarkson, who is vice chair of the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs, where she is tasked with work force development.

Clarkson said that one of her takeaways from the trip to Berlin was the breadth of the German system, which offers apprenticeships in 360 professions, compared with 28 in Vermont. Clarkson plans to introduce a bill next session that would double the number of programs offered in Vermont over five years.

Clarkson observed that even in Germany, where apprenticeships have their roots in the guild system dating back to the 13th century, there is room for improvement when it comes to work force development. Many companies still experience shortages of skilled workers, which is partly the consequence of an aging population and also results from the flexibility built into the dual-education system. Once apprentices graduate, they are not compelled to take a job at the company that trained them. Some choose to enroll in the university — which offers free tuition — or look for work at a different company. Since Germany’s system is standardized, employers know that all graduates within a profession receive the same level of training nationwide.

“It was interesting to see that they face some of the same challenges we do. They don’t have a silver bullet for this,” said Clarkson. “But it’s always great to be exposed to new ideas — these trips are professionally and culturally expanding for us. We dispelled some myths, and we took on some new models that we can make work in our own states.” ■

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aim of making recommendations to lawmakers for the upcoming legislative session. The hope is that providing women of color with greater access to doulas will help reduce the soaring rate of pregnancy-related deaths in their communities, said Everette.

In New Jersey, which has one of the oldest MMRCs in the country, Asare’s agency is exploring disparities in care among different communities and looking at issues around equity among providers. “We are really talking about implicit bias: how you look at other people and interact with them,” she said.

Other important factors that affect a woman’s level of care are the “social determinants of health” — which refer to the economic and social conditions in the places where people live and work that influence health risks and outcomes. “This is not just a health issue. It’s about so many other things: transportation, income, education — it’s about all of the things that feed into people’s day-to-day lives,” said Asare.

According to research by Review to Action, a partnership between the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and the CDC, only Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island do not have a MMRC among ERC states.

CSG/ERC will continue to follow this important issue and provide updates on additional recommendations.

According to a *USA Today* analysis of available maternal mortality data for 2016, Louisiana had the highest maternal mortality rate (58.1 per 100,000 births) and California had the lowest (4.0 per 100,000 births) in the United States. The following are the available results for ERC states. ■

State	Ranking (maternal deaths per 100,000 births)
Connecticut	#43 (10.5)
Delaware	unavailable
Maine	#28 (18.9)
Maryland	#23 (19.7)
Massachusetts	#45 (8.4)
New Hampshire	unavailable
New Jersey	#5 (36.2)
New York	#25 (19.2)
Pennsylvania	#31 (18.6)
Rhode Island	#15 (22.1)
Vermont	unavailable

*Source: USA Today



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