

Canada – United States
Inter-Parliamentary Group
Canadian Section



Groupe interparlementaire
Canada – États-Unis
Section canadienne

Report of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

Council of State Governments Midwestern Legislative Conference

Detroit, Michigan, United States of America

From July 9 to 12, 2023

Report

DELEGATION

From 9–12 July 2022, Senator Sharon Burey and Mr. Eric Duncan, M.P., attended the 77th Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments (CSG) Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC) in Detroit, Michigan. The delegation was accompanied by Marie Dumont, Advisor to the Canadian Section of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group (IPG).

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CANADA–UNITED STATES INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

The IPG aims to find points of convergence in respective national policies, to initiate dialogue on points of divergence, to encourage the exchange of information and to promote better understanding among legislators on shared issues of concern. Members of the IPG's Canadian Section meet regularly with their U.S. federal counterparts, and also attend meetings of state governors and legislators.

THE EVENT

Topics discussed during sessions of the MLC's 77th annual meeting included the Canada–United States bilateral relationship, energy and the environment, U.S. states relations with Taiwan, innovation and ideas in governance, and food security. This report summarizes key plenary and concurrent discussions from the meeting.

A. Midwest–Canada Relations Committee: Irregular Border Crossings and Border Issues in the Midwest and Canada

Alexander Vernon, Director, Immigration Law Clinic, University of Detroit Mercy

- Irregular border crossings at the Canada–U.S. border have become an issue over the past five to six years, with some individuals dying during their passage.
- The Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) – which came into effect in 2004 following the events of September 11th, 2001 – outlines that refugee claimants, barring some exceptions, are required to request refugee protection in the first safe country they arrive in. Under the STCA, Canada and the United States recognize each respective country as safe for refugees, preventing refugee claimants from seeking refugee status in the other country if they have sought it already in the first safe country they arrive in¹.

¹ For more information, see Madalina Chesoi and Robert Mason, [Overview of the Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement](#), Library of Parliament Hill Study Publication No. 2020-70-E, 20 October 2022.

- In 2017, the STCA faced a legal challenge from several human rights organizations, which argued that the Agreement, in sending back refugee claimants to the U.S., violated their right to liberty and security under the Canadian charter, because the U.S. is not a safe third country for all claimants according to those who filed the legal challenge. The Canadian Supreme Court [ruled](#) in June 2023 that the STCA should remain in effect.
- One exception to the STCA is known as “public interest.” Canada has narrowly defined that exception to the death penalty. If the claimant faces the death penalty, a punishment prohibited in Canadian law, then Canada may consider that the claimant be exempt from the STCA.
- When President Biden visited Canada in March 2023, Canada and the U.S. agreed to reform the STCA, extending it to apply at all designated and undesignated points of entry. Prior to that decision, the STCA did not apply to undesignated ports such as Roxham Road. As a result of the decision, Roxham Road has closed and the tents that had operated at the undesignated port of entry have been dismantled.

B. Midwest Legislative Council Energy and Environment Committee Meeting

Bob Kuzman, Director of State and Regulatory Affairs, Midcontinent Independent Systems Operator

- Midcontinent Independent Systems Operator (MISO) is a non-profit, member-based organization that operates in several states and Manitoba with 1,100 employees. MISO acts as a stock exchange for energy transmission with utility companies providing the energy. Its goal is to provide consistent energy at the lowest cost to consumers.
- With the states aiming to achieve decarbonization goals, MISO can help to achieve these goals while ensuring that electricity load can be maintained when some renewable sources, including wind and solar, are not able to produce and store enough energy.
- Renewable energy can pose problems for the electricity grid because, at present, MISO’s battery storage can only be sustained for about four hours. Other electricity sources such as coal and natural gas have needed to be used during periods when renewable energy is not able to generate electricity.
- Most – 96% in 2022 – of the new utility companies that are in the queue to provide energy through MISO are renewable energy companies.
- With growing uncertainty in weather conditions, and an increase in peak hours of electricity usage, the total electricity load capacity has needed to increase to ensure sustained energy supply during periods where more electricity is required.
- Concerning small nuclear reactors, while much work is being done to advance their development, at present, MISO is not relying on the technology to meet future electricity needs.

C. Force for Good: Taiwan Friendship Caucus in the Midwestern States

Senator Jim Runestad, Michigan State Legislature

- Taiwan has worked with U.S. states to establish memorandums of understanding and trade offices to develop trade relations at a state level. Agriculture, high-tech supply chains, education and academia are areas of cooperation.
- The State of Michigan established a bipartisan “Taiwan Friendship Caucus” in March 2022 and was the sixth Midwestern state to do so.
- In facing security threats from the People’s Republic of China, U.S. state support for Taiwan is important. Midwestern states are engaging with Taiwan in accordance with the federal *Taiwan Relations Act*.

D. Opening Plenary Remarks: Welcome to Michigan

Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II

- The CSG is a catalyst for making communities and states better. It has provided research assistance for a key Michigan initiative, the Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform.
- At CSG conferences, there are opportunities to learn from each other, “steal” or borrow ideas, and to ensure that with each policy, legislators are not reinventing the wheel when other jurisdictions have successfully implemented an idea.

E. Keynote Presentation: The Midwest’s Policy Landscape: A Look at What Surveys of Public Opinion – and Legislators Themselves – Tell Us

Reid Wilson, Founder and Editor, Pluribus News

- The “influence industry” (public relations companies, lobbyists, etc.) has increased its attention towards U.S. states, as demonstrated in recorded lobbying data.
- There are several policy trends that are receiving more attention from legislators, including:
 - mental health, with several states implementing a 988 mental health phone line;²
 - election reform, with discussions surrounding early voting, modernization and funding;
 - the economy, with fears of a recession ahead, discussions surrounding tax cuts, and opinions on rainy day funds for states;
 - infrastructure, with roads, bridges, broadband and electric vehicles as a focus of state initiatives;

² Canada also has a mental health crisis line, but it uses a different phone number with more digits. According to CBC News, a three-digit mental crisis line will come online at the end of November in 2023. See [“Canada to launch a nationwide 3-digit mental health hotline next year.”](#) CBC News, 31 August 2022.

- technology, with data privacy, social media and artificial intelligence on the minds of state legislators; and
- the workforce, with worker shortages following the COVID-19 pandemic, short-term competition and long-term training as current challenges.
- The 2022 midterm election exit polls revealed that voters are in a bad mood, and malaise about politics has gotten worse. For example, more voters disapproved of U.S. presidents than approved of them for 150 of 211 months since 2004.
- Partisanship is on the rise, and media organizations tend to reinforce partisan ideas, for example Fox News and MSNBC.
- When asked an open-ended question about the most important issue facing America, Democrats and Republicans had chosen completely different topics within the top five choices in 2022. By comparison, in 1999, four of the top five topics in the same survey were the same in 1999.
- One's choice of alcoholic beverages, beer, restaurants and car is found to have a relationship with what party that individual votes for, indicating that there are cultural differences between Republicans and Democrats.
- A Pluribus News survey from Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota and Ohio, entitled Life of a Legislator, provides some insights on job satisfaction, how legislators are spending their time and issues that matter to them.
- According to that survey, compared to previous years, 80% of legislators believed that the current legislative session in 2022 was more productive or as productive as the legislative sessions in previous years.
- The most important issues facing the states surveyed were:
 - budgets, taxes and the economy;
 - the workforce;
 - politics;
 - land issues; and
 - climate and the environment.

F. Midwest Legislatures in the 21st Century

Bob Cupp, Former Speaker of the House, Ohio House of Representatives

- The divide between political parties has grown. He believes that stricter rules and regulations for lobbying state legislators have contributed to this divide, because state legislators are less able to attend dinners and events that brought them together.
- At bipartisan events such as CSG Midwest, legislators are able to connect on a personal level to develop knowledge that would form and shape legislation.

Christine Greig, Former House Democratic Leader, Michigan House of Representatives

- The woman's caucus of the Michigan House of Representatives was a source of support and mentorship during Ms. Greig's time as a legislator.
- Legislators should offer training and professional development opportunities for their staff. Staff should be paid well and should be equipped with the right technology to ensure that legislators can do their job properly.
- Being a legislator can be the best job and the worst job. As a legislator, you should not lose sight of your values, and be prepared to stand up to the leadership in your party.

Helen Miller, Former Representative, Iowa House of Representatives

- Legislators must listen to their constituents. As a representative in Iowa, Ms. Miller was an African American person representing a majority white district. To understand her region, she needed to listen to her constituents.
- Over time, there have been fewer opportunities to engage in discourse with members of the other political party, which has had a negative effect.
- While African American legislators tended to focus issues surrounding human services, incarceration and education, Ms. Miller focused her efforts in office as the ranking member of the Agricultural community. By being genuinely interested in different issues, legislators can apply their knowledge, perspective and skills to a wide range of policy issues.

Christine Radogno, Former Minority Leader, Illinois Senate

- Legislators should work to foster bipartisan relationships. The Conference of Women Legislators helped Ms. Radogno to develop personal relationships with legislators from across the aisle.
- Decorum in legislatures has slipped; legislators should respect the institution and fellow legislators.
- There would be no need for politicians if everyone felt the same way. Legislators have the responsibility to represent the differing views of their many constituents.

G. Feature Luncheon Presentation: Where Good Ideas Come From and the Patterns of Innovation

Steven Johnson, Author, Expert on the History of Innovation

- "Michigan put the world on wheels"; accordingly, it is fitting that this conference, in Detroit, should have a session that focuses on innovation.
- We are using the wrong terminology to describe innovations. "Eureka," "lightbulb" and "aha moment" do not accurately describe the typical process of most great ideas, where a "slow hunch," when pondered over time, becomes a successful idea. For example, the Internet was a hunch of one individual who tinkered with the idea, then called "tangle," until it became a reality.

- People should write down their ideas.
- While the technology world has had a philosophy of “move fast and break things,” Mr. Johnson advocates for a philosophy of move slowly, experiment, and develop over time to bring great ideas to light.
- Learn from how other people have failed to see the future. For example, Edouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, the first person to invent a device capable of recording audio, 20 years ahead of Thomas Edison, did not invent a mechanism to play back the audio. He wanted to learn how to read sound waves on the paper where it was recorded and believed that people in the future would record audio on paper. Because Scott worked alone, his idea could only go so far. Working with other people offers opportunities for feedback and suggestions.
- Eighteenth-century coffee houses were the backbone of the enlightenment. What can we learn from those spaces? Taking time to talk with others in multidisciplinary spaces can lead to great ideas.
- Play is a prelude to serious ideas, and the early development phase of computer software is an example of the significance of play. The video game Space War in the 1960s became one of the most transformative pieces of open-source software because it was more fun to work on than other computer projects.
- There is an important role of institutions in creating and developing ideas. The eradication of smallpox is an example of a massive achievement by governments, global institutions and non-government organizations. We are telling stories of success that do not give credit to those institutions.

H. Chair’s Initiative Session on Food Security: Feeding the Future

Dr. Craig Gundersen, Professor, Snee Family Endowed Chair, Baylor University

- In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a negative impact on domestic food security, due to the government’s economic stimulus supports, the maximization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit, the efforts of the Feed America Network and food banks, and strong agricultural supply chains in the U.S. that ensured that food prices did not increase dramatically.
- In Canada, food insecurity plateaued or went up due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- However, in both countries, there continue to be worse outcomes for Black, Hispanic and Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities, even when accounting for income differences.
- The U.S. SNAP benefit, which provides monthly funds to buy food, is so successful because it reaches populations that are most in need. It is available to users as long as they need it for, with the average time being 9 to 12 months. It can be used at almost all food outlets, including convenience stores, but is mostly used at large supermarkets.
- If you are not well fed, you are not well read. Food access affects all dimensions of a person, including educational attainment in youth.

Valerie Tarasuk, Professor, University of Toronto, Department of Nutritional Sciences

- In Canada in 2022, food insecurity was higher than ever, affecting one out of five households. The COVID-19 pandemic had much less of an impact on food security than inflation, and government policies that have not kept up with inflation.
- Canada's approach to government support for food security is cash transfers, which gives people the choice of how they would like to spend their money.
- In Canada, most food insecure people receive income through employment. Accordingly, by having a small increase in minimum wages, food security increases. Provincial governments have a role in ensuring that minimum wages are high enough to enable citizens to be food secure.

Phil Knight, Executive Director, Food Bank Council of Michigan

- In believing that hunger can end in Michigan, Mr. Knight believes that the work he is doing will help to eradicate hunger, rather than simply manage the issue.
- There has been a movement to purchase unmarketable food, which is a win-win for producers and consumers.
- By partnering with Doordash to deliver food, accessing the food bank has become easier for some users. This example is a demonstration of the importance of being able to access food from food banks.
- While the concept of food deserts, meaning that a community does not have access to healthy food because a lack of grocery stores or markets, has received a lot of attention, there is a more important issue of personal food deserts. Examples of personal food deserts are situations where an individual or family is surrounded by food that is unaffordable and therefore inaccessible to them, or a disabled person cannot access food that is in physically close proximity to them. Food bank delivery services are one way to address these personal food deserts.

Dr. M. Jahi Johnson-Chappell, Director, Center for Regional Food Systems, Michigan State University

- Through his research in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Dr. Johnson-Chappell offered examples of best practices that could be applied to the North American context.
- In Brazil, food had been enshrined as a constitutional right of citizenship. Although this right was repealed under former President Jair Bolsonaro, it is likely to be reinstated by the current president. This constitutional right placed the onus on the state to build policies that enabled access to food, and required by law that food policy councils were established, leading to better outcomes and dignity for citizens.
- Small, local farms and local markets contribute to food security.

- Farmers should be the beneficiaries of food price increases. People need to be paid more, and by extension, pay farmers more for providing the food we consume.

I. Plenary Session: Priming the Pump: State Policies to Help Cities of the Midwest Prosper

Pete Saunders, Editor and Publisher, Corner Side Yard

- There is a lot of compelling evidence that Midwest cities are worth investing in. Midwestern cities are home to major universities, and have often successfully transitioned from manufacturing economies to service and knowledge economies.
- City planning requires a lot of time. As outlined in a [blog post](#) written by Mr. Saunders in Corner Side Yard, “Corporate accomplishments are measured in quarters or on an annual basis. Political accomplishments are measured by election cycles. Urban planning accomplishments are measured in generations.”
- There is a major issue of a lack of public transportation in cities in Michigan, which can be a deterrent for young people to consider living in Michigan.

J. Featured Luncheon Presentation: Why Place Matters – A Path for Building Healthier People and Communities

Shannon Wilson, Vice President, Population Health and Health Equity, Priority Health

- Addressing the deeper social determinant causes of poor health can help us to build policies. According to Priority Health, the causes of poor health are attributed to the following factors:
 - socioeconomic factors account for 40% of health outcomes;
 - the physical environment accounts for 10% of health outcomes;
 - behaviour and choices account for 30% of health outcomes; and
 - healthcare accounts for 20% of health outcomes.
- Citing Dr. Lester Breglow, who stated, “In the long run, housing may be more important to health than hospitals,” Dr. Wilson stressed the importance of housing policy as part of the spectrum of health policy.
- What does it cost to not invest in health equity? Deloitte estimated that inequities in the U.S. health care system cost \$320 billion annually, from unnecessary health care spending due to biases and structural inequities. This cost is expected to increase to \$1 trillion annually by 2040 if unaddressed.
- Insurance companies in the U.S. collect comprehensive member profiles, which accumulate data on their users. This information can benefit governments to help inform policy.

- Certain innovative practices from Priority Health have been effective at treating different issues. For example, to address asthma, the insurance company would replace curtains, remove carpets and change bedding, leading to reductions in the instances of asthma attacks.

K. Featured Session: United States–Canada Federal Relations

Randy Hoback, Member of Parliament, House of Commons

- The negotiations for the *Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement* involved many in-person meetings with legislators.
- For Canadians, it is easier to get the attention of U.S. legislators the first year after an election. When it is the year before an election, it is difficult to secure appointments to talk with U.S. legislators because their focus is on the upcoming election.
- As legislators build legislation, they should consider how that legislation could affect Canada and the U.S. By establishing personal relationships with legislators from respective countries, you can discuss possible unintended consequences with them.
- To learn about different perspectives, sit with people who you do not know at these conferences.

Brian Masse, Member of Parliament, House of Commons

- Canadian jobs in the automotive sector should not compete with the United States and manufacturers in the Detroit region, but instead with companies in Europe and Asia.
- The window of opportunity to get the attention of U.S. legislators is small, so Canadian legislators must use their opportunities to engage wisely.
- It is time to pursue a North American Auto Strategy, during this time that Mr. Masse coins “the platinum age of automotive,” where technology and manufacturing work hand in hand.
- Organizing tours to show young people the bridges between Windsor in Canada and Detroit in the U.S. would help to enhance understanding between the two countries.

Colin Peterson, Founder/President, The Peterson Group, former Minnesota Representative in the House of Representatives

- There are certain issues that bring Canada on the radar of Americans. Most recently, it has been the smoke from wildfires, but also bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, commonly known as “mad cow disease”), the wheat board, dairy and softwood lumber have been issues that have garnered attention in the U.S.
- In the future, most high-tech businesses will be focused on agriculture. Those businesses will need to learn how to feed the world with fewer pesticides and fertilizers.

Rick Snyder, Founder/CEO, SensCy, former Governor of Michigan

- The greatest obstacle in the U.S. is the inability for people to get along with each other. There is a lack of civility in politics that must be addressed.
- When meeting with another legislator, try to find one action item or policy area to focus on, then work to action it. “Nice” meetings are ineffective, so when Mr. Snyder was in office, he would try to have meetings that would lead to action.

L. Site Visit: Black History Tour of Detroit

Jamon Jordan, Educator and Historian, Black Scroll Network, History and Tours

- Jamon Jordan, Educator and Historian, [Black Scroll Network](#), History and Tours • The Black Scroll Network has been offering Black history tours of Detroit since 2013.
- Jamon Jordan, who was [appointed](#) as Detroit’s first official historian in 2021 and teaches at the University of Michigan, led a tour of Detroit that showed neighbourhoods and monuments that are significant to Black history in this majority Black city, including the Ossian Sweet House, Black Bottom and the Fannie Richards Homesite.
- At the Gateway to Freedom Monument, which overlooks the Detroit River facing Canada, delegates saw the significance of Canada during the period of the Underground Railroad. The monument states: “Detroit was one of the largest terminals of the Underground Railroad, a network of abolitionists aiding enslaved people seeking freedom... At first, Michigan was a destination for freedom seekers, but Canada became a safer sanctuary after slavery was abolished there in 1834. With passage of the *Fugitive Slave Act* in 1850, many runaways left their homes in Detroit and crossed the river to Canada to remain free. Some returned after Emancipation in 1863.”

MEETING CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVES

In addition to the activities of the conference, delegates had the opportunity to meet with Detroit’s Consul General Colin Bird and Steve Neves, Consul, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Service, at the Consulate General of Canada to the United States in Detroit. The meeting included the following points of discussion:

- As a mission that is located near the heart of the Great Lakes, the Canadian Consulate General in Detroit works to foster binational cooperation in this important economic region.
- The U.S. has put a lot of funding into the Great Lakes, and were pleased with Canada’s funding commitment of \$420 million over 10 years towards environmental work in the Great Lakes.
- There are opportunities to build relationships through cultural diplomacy engagement, including by hosting events focused on Black history.

- Since the response to the events of 11 September 2001, there has been less border crossing between Detroit and Windsor. While security has trumped trade and convenience, there could be opportunities to encourage cross-border travel for residents in the region.

Delegates also had the opportunity to meet provincial legislators from Saskatchewan, which is the only Canadian province that is a full member of CSG Midwest, as well as representatives from Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba, affiliate members of CSG Midwest.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The CSG MLC allowed members of the Canadian Section to engage with U.S. and Canadian legislators and other stakeholders from across the Midwest region on issues affecting Canada and the United States. Members were able to gather information on many important topics that relate to their role as federal legislators, including food security, border issues, energy and the environment. For members of the Canadian Section, the CSG MLC is a key opportunity for sharing and binational dialogue.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Michael MacDonald,
Senator
Co-Chair
Canada-United States Inter-
Parliamentary Group

Hon. John McKay, P.C., M.P.,
Co-Chair
Canada–United States Inter-
Parliamentary Group

Travel Costs

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| ASSOCIATION | Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group |
| ACTIVITY | Council of State Governments (CSG) Midwest Regional Conference |
| DESTINATION | Detroit, Michigan, United States of America |
| DATES | From July 9 to 12, 2023 |
| DELEGATION | |
| SENATE | Hon. Sharon Burey |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS | Mr. Eric Duncan, M.P. |
| STAFF | Marie Dumont, Advisor |
| TRANSPORTATION | \$2,361.51 |
| ACCOMMODATION | \$3,190.39 |
| HOSPITALITY | \$0.00 |
| PER DIEMS | \$624.05 |
| MISCELLANEOUS | \$1,918.95 |
| TOTAL | \$8,094.90 |