

Canada – United States
Inter-Parliamentary Group
Canadian Section



Groupe interparlementaire
Canada – États-Unis
Section canadienne

Report of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

Legislative Summit of the National Conference of State Legislatures

Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America

From August 5 to 8, 2019

Report

DELEGATION MEMBERS AND STAFF

From 5–8 August 2019, the Honourable Senator Diane Griffin, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group (IPG), led a delegation to the annual legislative summit of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in Nashville, Tennessee. Delegation members included the Honourable Senators Scott Tannas and Paul McIntyre, Mr. David Christopherson M.P., and Mr. Colin Fraser M.P. The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Miriam Burke, Executive Secretary of the Canadian Section, and Ms. Tanya Dupuis, the Canadian Section’s Advisor.

THE EVENT

Founded in 1975, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is a bipartisan organization serving the legislators and legislative staff of the 50 U.S. states, as well as its commonwealths and territories. It provides research, technical assistance and a venue for the exchange of ideas on state issues. As well, it advocates state interests before the U.S. Congress and federal agencies.

The NCSL is governed by an executive committee and has nine standing committees on which legislators participate. These committees are the following:

- Budgets and Revenue
- Communications, Financial Services and Interstate Commerce
- Education
- Health and Human Services
- Labour and Economic Development
- Law, Criminal Justice and Public Safety
- Legislative Effectiveness
- Natural Resources and Infrastructure
- Redistricting and Elections.

As well, legislators participate on the following nine NCSL task forces:

- Agriculture
- Cybersecurity
- Energy Supply

- Immigration and the States
- Innovations in State Health Systems
- Insurance
- International Relations
- Military and Veterans Affairs
- State and Local Taxation

ACTIVITIES AND DELEGATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE EVENT

At NCSL's 2019 legislative summit, presentations were made on a variety of subjects, many of which have relevance for Canada; delegates from the IPG's Canadian Section benefitted from information that will inform their legislative work. Typically, the sessions at the NCSL's legislative summit address such topics as agriculture, budgets, criminal justice, economic development, education, employment, energy, the environment, financial services, health, human services, immigration, information technology, insurance, natural resources, pensions, rural development, taxation, trade and transportation.

The interaction with state legislators on the full range of issues discussed at the NCSL's annual legislative summit enables members of the IPG's Canadian Section to achieve the aim of finding points of convergence in respective policies, initiating dialogue on points of divergence, encouraging exchanges of information and promoting better understanding on shared issues of concern. Moreover, the meetings with state legislators provide members of the Canadian Section with an opportunity to give input to, and gather information about, state-level issues that affect Canada.

In addition to attending the sessions designed to inform state legislators, Mr. Fraser delivered a speech to the NCSL Executive Committee concerning the work of the IPG, its activities, and Canada–United States relations. Members of the Canadian Section joined legislators from about 18 countries or regions worldwide at some of the International Program's activities.

This report summarizes the discussions that occurred at selected sessions.

PANEL ON MISINFORMATION IN THE 21st CENTURY

Utah Representative Keven J. Stratton and Dr. Noam Lupu, Vanderbilt University

- The dissemination of misinformation is increasing across the world.
- As technology becomes more accessible and advanced, it is contributing to the spread of misinformation.
- Individuals with poor digital literacy skills can unknowingly spread false information on social media platforms.

- When cellular companies require individuals to pay for their data consumption but offer free access to social media platforms, they indirectly contribute to the spreading of misinformation; individuals are less likely to use their paid data to do fact checking before posting information on social media. Moreover, many individuals only access the Internet through their cellular phones.
- Efforts have been made by various social media platforms to control the dissemination of misinformation. By way of example, social media platforms can now limit the number of “forwards” made by individuals. Other social media platforms, such as Facebook, are hiring “fact checkers” to verify the accuracy of their information feeds.

SLOWING DOWN BAD BEHAVIOR ON ROADWAYS

LT Bill Miller, Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security

- Distracted and impaired driving were the top two traffic safety concerns in the United States in 2019.
- The Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security increased its efficiency and effectiveness by making all accident reports electronic. Doing so allowed police officers to use a hot spot tracking system and target the areas with the highest rates of impaired driving accidents. The death toll related to impaired driving accidents in Tennessee has since diminished and is now below the national average.
- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, human behaviour accounts for 94% of all traffic crashes. There are three known levels of distraction while driving a vehicle: cognitive, manual and visual.
- Tennessee’s texting while driving law has been beneficial to counter distracted driving but it continues to be difficult for police officers to ascertain whether the person was texting or just holding their phone while driving.
- Tennessee law enforcement officers find the new hands-free legislation in other U.S. states to be promising. With this new legislation, it is an offence to be holding a cellular phone in your hands while driving. Law enforcement does not need to prove what the individual was doing with their phone while driving. The law does provide exceptions for first responders in the performance of their duties, and citizens who need to make an emergency call to a first responder for help.
- It is believed that new hands-free legislation will save close to 50 or 60 lives a year; however, education on the dangers of distracted driving is still the best remedy and is very much needed.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE DISCUSSION

John Murphy, Senior Vice President for International Policy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

- Many U.S. jobs in the manufacturing and technology sector are dependant of the Canada-U.S. trading relationship as nearly half of the output in these two sectors is exported to Canada.
- Now that the tariffs on steel and aluminum products have been lifted, the United States should address the tariffs imposed on goods originating from China. There are no easy solutions, but the United States should start working with its allies and it should begin negotiations as soon as possible.
- The United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) will undoubtedly help strengthening and modernizing the Canada–United States trade relationship.

Eric Gottwall, Policy Specialist for Trade and International Economics

- Trade is extremely important to the Canada–United States relationship. Almost everything that is bought today was made possible due to this mutual trading relationship.
- Trade agreements have been very good at setting the rules for goods and services crossing the Canada–United States border.
- President Trump was correct in asserting that the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) was a “bad” trade deal for the United States. Repercussions from NAFTA have led to job loss in the United States. The USMCA, however, seems promising in that regard.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS

Vicki Freeman, Director of Women’s Services Tennessee Department of Corrections

Tim Loney, Deputy Director, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency

David Pelletier, Project Director, Veterans Treatment Court Planning Initiative at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

Representative Paul Ray, Utah Legislature

- More and more U.S. veterans are returning home after serving their country with behavioural health disorders. A relatively significant number of them are also homeless.
- U.S. states should take note of the staggering number of justice-involved veterans and determine how to better address their needs from the time of arrest through to re-entry into society.

- Since military culture is unique, veterans who become justice-involved require clinical and criminogenic interventions that are culturally sensitive to them.
- Veteran treatment courts are being created in many U.S. states. The veteran treatment court model is based on a recognition that military service sometimes traumatizes a service member, and that criminal behaviour may arise out of that trauma.
- The state of Michigan is currently housing 2,600 incarcerated veterans. With a very large concentration of veterans, Michigan has created nearly 27 veteran treatment courts.
- In the state of Utah, a veteran treatment court was created through legislation, by way of *The Veterans Treatment Court Act*. The state hopes to create more of them.
- Other U.S. state measures to help justice-involved veterans include:
 - A pending House Bill in Minnesota that would create guidelines for courts that are sentencing military veterans with service-related disorders.
 - A pending House Bill in North Carolina providing that a sentencing court may consider post-traumatic stress disorder as a mitigating factor when sentencing a veteran.
 - A pending New Jersey Assembly Bill that would create veteran diversion programs for those charged with a criminal offence.
 - A pending Senate Bill in Puerto Rico that would instruct the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs to study the establishment, financing and operating costs of a Veteran Treatment Court in Puerto Rico.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Hon. Wayne Easter, P.C., M.P., Co-Chair
Canada–United States
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Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group
ACTIVITY	Legislative Summit of the National Conference of State Legislatures
DESTINATION	Nashville, Tennessee, United States of America
DATES	August 5-8, 2019
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Scott Tannas Hon. Paul McIntyre
HOUSE OF COMMONS	David Christopherson Colin Fraser
STAFF	Miriam Burke Tanya Dupuis
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 11,313.97
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 11,014.89
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,122.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 7,603.22
TOTAL	\$ 33,054.08