

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 2022 (CSG) National Conference

Honolulu, Hawaii, United States of America

December 7–10, 2022

REPORT

DELEGATION MEMBERS

From 7–10 December 2022, Senator Michael MacDonald and MP John McKay, Co-Chairs of the Canadian Section of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, led a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians at the 2022 CSG (Council of State Governments) National Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii. Senator Jean-Guy Dagenais and MPs Brad Redekopp and Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay rounded out the delegation, accompanied by David Chandonnet and Sarah Lemelin-Bellerose, the Canadian Section’s Association Secretary and Advisor, respectively.

THE CONFERENCE

The CSG serves all three branches of U.S. state governments and organizes regional forums allowing participants to exchange ideas and shape public policy: the Border Legislative Conference, Midwestern Legislative Conference, Southern Legislative Conference, and Eastern Regional Conference. Each year, state legislators from across the United States, at times accompanied by governors, attend the CSG National Conference.

DELEGATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE CONFERENCE

For the Canadian Section, the CSG National Conference is an important opportunity for discussion. It provides members with the chance to engage with state legislators from across the United States to gather information, speak out on issues of mutual importance, and clarify Canada’s significant role in multiple matters. In this regard, speakers at one of the Conference’s main sessions emphasized the relationship between Canada and the United States and the importance of Canada’s participation in various Conference sessions. The Canadian Section’s presence at the Conference contributes to the achievement of four main objectives: to find points of convergence in our respective policies, to initiate dialogue about points of divergence, facilitate information sharing, and arrive at a better understanding of common concerns among legislators.

CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

There were presentations on many different topics at the 2022 CSG National Conference, most of which were relevant to Canada. Canadian Section delegates obtained information that will inform their parliamentary work. This year, delegates participated in sessions on employment policies during labour shortages, electric grid modernization, cybersecurity, the context and implications of U.S. midterm elections, and the economic outlook for 2023. In addition to attending sessions meant to raise awareness among state legislators, the Canadian Section held a meeting with Rana Sarkar, the Consul General of Canada in San Francisco, who also attended the CSG National Conference. The [Consulate General of Canada to the United States in San Francisco](#) provides services to Canadians in three regions: Northern California, Hawaii and San Francisco. In addition to supporting Canadians living and travelling abroad, consulates seek to strengthen trade and economic ties, increase political, academic and cultural collaboration, and promote Canada. At their meeting, Canadian Section delegates and Mr. Sarkar discussed the Canada–United States relationship and Canada’s place in the Indo–Pacific Region. Mr.

Sarkar also held a reception where Canadian Section delegates, a large number of legislators, and various stakeholders were able to exchange views.

The following is a summary of selected session discussions

Modernizing the Electric Grid

Leo Asuncion, Chair, Hawaii Public Utilities Commission

Mr. Asuncion spoke about ways to modernize Hawaii's electric grid to ensure its resilience and capacity to meet the ever-growing energy needs of the population.

- Hawaii's electric grid is not unified. Since Hawaii is made up of islands, it cannot establish energy partnerships with surrounding areas, and each island has its own electric grid.
- Hawaii relies primarily on imported petroleum to meet its energy needs, which is very costly. The state no longer wants to import its energy, but it has not yet identified an alternative energy source that could be produced locally to meet the needs of the population.
- Modernizing the electric grid by transitioning to renewable energy is crucial to improving grid resilience, and it would provide more cost-effective options to meet the needs of the Hawaiian population. Hawaii has committed to achieving 100% renewable energy by 2045. Currently, 41% of the energy it produces comes from renewables. Developing local renewable energy sources would reduce costs and mitigate risks associated with the electric grid.
- Given the different needs of each Hawaiian island, modernizing the electric grid has long been the object of planning and discussion. Hawaii introduced a strategy to modernize its electric grid in 2015. The state requires an integrated approach that combines the capacity of all its islands.
 - o Integrated Grid Planning is a targeted collaborative process to address economic and social issues and prepare for future needs. Hawaii has drawn up a map of zones where it could produce renewable energy and determined potential improvements to each island's electric grid. It plans to present an initial integrated plan to modernize the grid in 2023.

Melissa Savage, Transportation Expert, CDM Smith

Ms. Savage discussed the importance of new federal initiatives to support state efforts to modernize their electric grids and infrastructure to meet the growing and changing needs of the population.

- The [*Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*](#) is considered historic and unprecedented in terms of the funding it provides. In addition to providing significant funding for infrastructure projects, the Act will also provide funding to more stakeholders.
- The [*Inflation Reduction Act*](#) has introduced incentives to change individual and corporate behaviour. Individuals can apply a tax credit when purchasing an electric vehicle, and businesses receive a tax credit for producing energy from renewables.

- The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) also provides funding to improve infrastructure resilience and modernize electric grids.

R.B. Walker, Director of Legislative Affairs, Alabama Power Company

- To ensure that its electric grid is robust, Alabama has forged partnerships with other states. Alabama has many rural areas; as a result, it needs to find solutions to deliver electricity reliably and affordably.
- Alabama is not introducing incentives to encourage people to purchase electric cars, but state-based automotive manufacturers in the state are committed to developing electric vehicles to respond for the anticipated increase in demand.
- The properties of fibre optics make them useful for the long-term resilience of an electric grid. They are also faster to repair after a natural disaster. Fibres installed to strengthen the electric grid can also be used to provide broadband internet service.
 - o For example, Alabama had a major rural connectivity problem several years ago, ranking among the worst in the United States. Rural populations were compelled to seek out internet connectivity in restaurants. The state tried several ways to improve rural connectivity. It ultimately succeeded by providing funding for major infrastructure and passing legislation allowing electricity providers to also provide telecommunications services.

B. ARE YOU READY FOR A CYBER CRISIS?

Jamie Ward, Cybersecurity Expert, Center for Internet Security, and Shawn Riley, Chief Information Officer, North Dakota

Mr. Ward and Mr. Ryley discussed the importance of doing more to protect computer systems, given the increasing frequency of cyberattacks in recent years.

- The fact that all networks are interconnected means cybersecurity is everyone's business. A network is only as strong as its weakest link.
- There is still much work to be done to protect federal and state computer networks:
 - o The U.S. government has 140,000 vacant cybersecurity jobs;
 - o More funding is needed to secure the networks;
 - o Several government organizations do not have cybersecurity mechanisms in place;
 - o Some outdated systems have hidden vulnerabilities—governments tend to keep technology that is more than 20 years old, posing a major security risk; and
 - o An increasing number of primary schools teach computer programming and other related skills, posing the risk of infiltration by hackers.
- Hackers from large organizations and certain countries are looking to not only disrupt systems, but also infiltrate and remain within a system as observers, awaiting an opportune moment to attack.
- Governments are responsible for protecting the personal information that citizens provide to various government organizations. There are various things governments can do to strengthen the security of IT systems:

- o It is important for governments to take a comprehensive approach that includes as many organizations as possible. Forming a coalition with multiple organizations helps defend systems more broadly. Coalition members can help each other following an attack.
- o Each state should set targets and assess the maturity and capacity of its cybersecurity infrastructure.
- o Provide staff and employees with cybersecurity training.
- o Some systems require automation to defend against multiple attacks.
- o There must be mechanisms in place to protect data and ensure that in the event of an attack, data remains unalterable and fully recoverable.

C. RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING: HOW STATES ARE INNOVATING TO CREATE NEW PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

The three speakers fielded questions and shared their thoughts on how states can create new pathways to employment to address the current labour shortage.

- To address the labour shortage, states have identified underrepresented groups in the labour market and introduced measures to include them.
 - o For example, people with disabilities are underrepresented in the labour market because they face many barriers to participation. One such barrier is transportation. Accessible transportation benefits the entire population. Alabama has introduced measures to reduce barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities.
 - o Certain socioeconomic groups are also underrepresented. Some states have launched pilot projects to improve these groups' access to post-secondary education. For example, one pilot project allowed students to attend community college for free. Students were also given access to resources such as mentors to increase their chances of success.
 - o Ultimately, greater diversity in the workforce means better public services.

D. THE NEXT FARM BILL: WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR YOUR STATE

Sam Kieffer, Vice President of Public Policy, American Farm Bureau Federation; Charles Younger, Senator, Mississippi; Steve Beshear, Former Governor, Kentucky

Speakers answered questions and shared their thoughts on the upcoming Farm Bill, which is expected to be brought forward in 2023.

- The Farm Bill is a package of federal legislation that is renewed about every five years. This legislative package has the greatest impact on agriculture in the United States. The current Farm Bill was enacted into law in December 2018 and will expire in 2023.
 - o The Farm Bill is very comprehensive. It includes program support for nutrition, food security, safety nets for farmers, conservation, soil protection, and research. It also includes measures to address the labour shortage in the agricultural sector.
 - o The Farm Bill is bipartisan. Points of conflict arises not between political parties, but rather between regions with vastly differing realities.

- There are multiple issues affecting farmers, including:
 - o A pressing need for data to better understand different types of cultivation.
 - o Many farmers do not have access to high-speed internet, required for access to many programs that would benefit them.
 - o The farming population is aging, and it is very costly for young or new farmers to enter the field.
 - o Input costs for farmers, such as the cost of fertilizer and gasoline, have increased significantly in recent years.

Phyllis Shimabukuro-Geyser, Chairperson, Hawaii Department of Agriculture

Ms. Shimabukuro-Geyser spoke about agriculture and food security issues in Hawaii.

- Agriculture is a big industry in Hawaii, a state that is home to a wide variety of fruit and flower crops. Hawaii is a major exporter of fresh basil to Canada.
- In Hawaii, more than eight million acres of land are state-owned. It is very expensive for new farmers to buy land, so the state rents out some of it to make it more affordable.
- Hawaii imports much of its food but wants to reduce its dependence on imports. Since 2017, the state has introduced legislation and measures to boost local food production. Hawaii has identified the crops it could develop locally and the land that could be used for such crops.
- Hawaii's priorities for the next Farm Bill are to support farmers and increase food security.

E. MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN SOCIAL INEQUITIES WITH DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Richard Leadbeater, Global Manager, Esri Inc.

Mr. Leadbeater discussed and answered questions on the importance of using available databases to inform public policy.

- In the United States, large databases are available for free. States and organizations can use these databases to guide decision-making. Using available data can help cities and states better understand the needs of their populations.
- Measuring things offers insight into their value, and this is true of public policy too. It is important to establish tools for measuring public policies:
 - o Identify priorities;
 - o Establish the elements that ensure the well-being of a region or country;
 - o Use mapping, which is essential to visualize data and understand the impact of public policy.
- For example, mapping can provide a clearer picture of broadband internet service access and use. In one U.S. city, data showed that some libraries were particularly popular for accessing broadband internet service. As a result, local authorities have

focused their funding on improving infrastructure at these libraries rather than providing smaller amounts of funding to many libraries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Once again, the CSG National Conference allowed members of the Canadian Section to engage with legislators and other stakeholders from across the United States and affirm the important role Canada plays on a wide range of issues. Members were able to gather information on many topics of importance to Canadian parliamentary business, including employment policies during labour shortages, electric grid modernization, and the 2023 economic outlook. For members of the Canadian Section, the various CSG Conferences are key opportunities for sharing and dialogue.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Michael L. 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

ASSOCIATION	Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group
ACTIVITY	Council of State Governments 2022 (CSG) National Conference
DESTINATION	Honolulu, Hawaii, United States of America
DATES	December 7-10, 2022
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais Michael L. MacDonald
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Brad Redekopp Hon. John McKay Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay
STAFF	David Chandonnet Association Secretary Sarah Lemelin-Bellerose, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$26,966.77
ACCOMMODATION	\$15,324.68
HOSPITALITY	\$1,154.81
PER DIEMS	\$4,197.27
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$5,514.30
TOTAL	\$53,157.83