AGENDA 11.14.09

Have a Starry Night
California Late Night Reception
Saturday, Nov. 14 | 9-11 p.m. | Main Lawn (behind lobby)

Saturday night California hosts a night to remember under the stars. Enjoy appetizers and local wines while dancing to the sounds of one of the area’s best-loved bands.

Chief Justices Appeal for Interbranch Interaction

Get four chief justices together on a panel and you get some big ideas that reach far beyond the judicial branch. In fact, the judges were aiming for more interbranch cooperation Friday afternoon at a panel sponsored by The Council of State Governments Interbranch Working Group.

One issue where desperate dialogue is needed among the branches is budget reductions in the states. Those reductions are hitting the judicial branch just as hard as other branches, according to the justices.

“Your obligation in your state is to administer justice, openly, completely and without delay,” said Oregon Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul DeMuniz. But in the realities of the fiscal environment, that essential function of the courts is crippled, he said. “Feast and famine budgeting is very destabilizing to the courts. The courts are not like a faucet that you can turn on and off at will.”

Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb agrees. In her state, 97.5 percent of the funding for the courts goes to personnel, so there’s very little to cut, she said.

Back in 2001, Alabama’s judicial branch stomachached layoffs and issued an emergency order to close clerk’s offices just so the clerks could simply catch up on paperwork.

“What happened was, people would take off from work to come to the court. So it’s not just hurting judges or clerks, it’s hurting the public,” Cobb said.

“The court system is well aware of the fiscal problems that the legislature faces,” said Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson. But she said the judicial branch works with the legislature to make sure budget cuts aren’t crippling.

“What they’ve done, they talk to us before they look at the judicial budget and start to figure out how much they have to reduce,” Abrahamson said.

With that, the court system in Wisconsin is trying to bring in money. One example is how the state’s judicial branch works with the federal government and the state to intercept funds through tax collections, she said. Instead of giving a tax refund to someone who owes money to the courts, the judicial branch intercepts the money, Abrahamson said.

Another theme that’s straining already strained judicial budgets is the uptick in the number of people representing themselves in court, without a lawyer, according to Kentucky Supreme Court Justice John D. Minton Jr.

“The system is going to be strained at every level with the clog of dockets of unrepresented people,” Minton said.

——Mikel Chavers
New Jersey’s Regional Assessment Centers are innovative alternatives to local jails for temporarily holding people arrested for committing technical parole violations. These are violations of supervision conditions, not new crimes or a significant threat to public safety. Many technical parole violators suffer from alcohol or drug addiction. Staff at the privately run facilities in Newark and Trenton assess and treat the parole violator, then make recommendations to the state parole board. New Jersey’s strategy to process technical parole violators through these centers has significantly lowered the number of people who are re-incarcerated while helping them get services they need to become productive citizens again.

CONTACT | Yolette C. Ross, chair, New Jersey State Parole Board at yolette.ross@spb.state.nj.us. Visit www.state.nj.us/parole for more information.

New York’s Green Leadership in Transportation and Environmental Sustainability Program, or GreenLITES, is a rating system created to ensure environmentally sustainable features and practices are incorporated into the roads, bridges and related infrastructure the New York State Department of Transportation builds and maintains. The department rates its projects against 150 criteria under five categories: sustainable sites, water quality, materials and resources, energy and atmosphere, and innovation/unlisted. Department projects are ultimately deemed GreenLITES Certified, GreenLITES Silver, GreenLITES Gold or GreenLITES Evergreen. Projects with the highest number of sustainable features are classified as GreenLITES Evergreen.

CONTACT | Paul Krekeler, GreenLITES program manager, New York State Department of Transportation at pkrekeler@dot.state.ny.us. Visit www.nysdot.gov/programs/greenlites for more information.

Wisconsin-Pennsylvania Egrants - Grants Management System represents Web-based applications the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the Wisconsin Office of Justice of Assistance created to publicize and administer grants. Both agencies list on their Web sites available grants and process all grant applications and related material online through Egrants. Each state operates its own Egrants Web site; Wisconsin worked with the Pennsylvania Crime Commission to use Pennsylvania’s source code and IT vendor to help set up its Web site. The system improves state services to the public and is an outstanding example of interstate cooperation.


Michigan’s Water Withdrawal Assessment Process is used by the state Department of Environmental Quality to help regulate projects that withdraw large quantities of surface water or groundwater throughout the state. The assessment uses a variety of criteria to determine whether such projects must register with the department or get a permit. Applicants can estimate how their water withdrawal proposal might impact surrounding ecosystems via a unique Web-based screening tool. Only those applications that indicate an adverse effect are referred to the department for a site specific review.


A fence was erected along a road in Tupper Lake, N.Y., to redirect turtles from the road into a causeway area and gained a GreenLITES designation. Photos courtesy of New York GreenLITES.

Michigan wants to protect its natural beauty and water resources. So it developed a Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool to estimate the likely impact of a water withdrawal on nearby streams and rivers. Photo by Jeremiah Asher for the Michigan Land and Water Management Division.
**WEST**

Wyoming Healthy Families Succeed Program is a coordinated strategy to help families who receive services from more than one state agency. Those were the people who were taking more than 10 unique prescriptions per year, for example. The program—coordinated by state human service agencies, Human Capital Management Services and the University of Wyoming—has two main components: HealthAssist and JobAssist. Nurses, pharmacists and experienced job counselors call or visit families in their homes to encourage informed consumerism, self-sufficiency and improved decision-making. Healthy Families Succeed has enrolled more than 304 families with 921 household members. As a result of the program, the total costs to serve these clients decreased by approximately $2,000 per person over two years.

**CONTACT** | William D. Totten, CDL program director, at william.d.totten@wv.gov

New Mexico’s Innovative Digital Education and Learning Initiative, or IDEAL-New Mexico, provides eLearning services to New Mexico P-12 schools, higher education institutions and government agencies. More than 1,300 students from 53 districts, 13 charter schools and three nonpublic schools have registered to use the system since the Web site launched in 2008. The site’s Higher Education Clearinghouse lists more than 2,000 courses offered online by colleges and universities. The initiative reduces geographic and capacity barriers to educational opportunity while increasing the digital literacy skills students need to compete in a global economy. Eventually, teachers and state employees will be able to get professional training through this Web site.

**CONTACT** | Sandra Henson, executive director, IDEAL-NM at sandra.henson@state.nm.us. Visit www.ideal-nm.org for more information.

**SOUTH**

West Virginia’s Electronic Commercial Driver Licensing Program, or eCDL, uses laptop computers, GPS tracking and wireless technology to combat fraud and help examiners administer the Commercial Driver License or CDL tests in the state. Testing includes vehicle inspections, driving and maneuvering skills assessment, and a review to ensure CDL applicants understand the rules of the road for large vehicles. Results are transmitted from laptops to a secure Web site at the Rahall Transportation Institute at Marshall University, where computers compile the information, score the results—all the while checking for fraud—and then download the information to Department of Motor Vehicle Offices throughout the state, which, depending on test scores, issue CDL licenses. The system also monitors CDL examiners.

**CONTACT** | Sheila Rucker, program administrator, Roedeker Correctional Complex, Substance Abuse Treatment Program, at Sheila.Rucker@ky.gov. Visit www.corrections.ky.gov for more information.

Kentucky’s Department of Corrections Re-entry Hotline is a 24-hour toll-free hotline that provides information about parole compliance, job training and other social services to callers who are just out of prison. Inmates near the end of their prison term staff the hotline. Corrections department staff provide resources and train the volunteer inmates. The hotline averages 3,000 calls each year, and provides benefits to both the inmates who staff the hotline and those making the calls. Corrections staff hope those benefits will help reduce prison recidivism.

**CONTACT** | Becky Teal, administrative assistant, Healthy Families Succeed at bteal@clinicalprevention.com. Visit www.healthyfamiliessucceed.com/cphfs/ for more information.

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2009 Keon Chi State Governance Transformation Award

The Wisconsin-Minnesota Collaboration Project is a nation-leading effort to improve government efficiency by sharing services.

“These challenging times provide us an opportunity to make state government more accountable and efficient,” Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty said in announcing the project with Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle March 31. Both signed executive orders requiring agencies in their states to meet with their counterparts and develop ideas for collaboration.

“We are committed to taking action now and building on these efforts in the future,” Doyle said.

The meetings identified more than 80 projects under six broad categories: joint procurement, cross border collaboration, IT systems, reciprocation, shared resources and sharing best practices. Examples include bulk purchasing tires for state fleets, coordinating pest and invasive species control, and sharing data to improve tax collections and reduce tax fraud.

To read the full Wisconsin-Minnesota Collaboration Report, visit www.wisgov.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=16272.
Genographic Project Traces the Family Tree Back to Africa

Many folks have traced their roots but not many can go back 60,000 years.
That’s something Spencer Wells and the National Geographic Genographic Project are doing. Wells, a population geneticist, discussed the project during the opening plenary session Friday.

Genographic scientists collect DNA samples from people around the globe to paint the picture of human migration. Wells said using the samples, scientists are able to explain the pattern of human diversity.

His project goes much deeper than the average person tracing his or her family tree.

“No matter how well you know your family history, everybody hits a brick wall,” he said.

The Genographic Project has traced the human origin back to Africa; in fact, to three potential ancestors living at the same place at the same time, Wells said. For that reason, the project is keenly interested in indigenous peoples, he said. But that doesn’t limit the project.

“It’s the human story,” he said. “It’s not just the story of indigenous people but everybody alive.”

Wells said humans share 99.9 percent of DNA.

“There’s a very low level of genetic variation,” he said. “There’s hardly any variation at all.”

In fact, Wells said while past anthropological thought highlighted the differences in races, “we’re all much more closely related than anybody ever suspected.”

More than 320,000 people from 130 countries purchased the DNA kits to participate in the project, Wells said. Part of the money from the kit sales is plowed back into the project’s Legacy Fund, which benefits indigenous and traditional communities around the world preserve their cultural legacy.

“Peel away the surface and we’re all members of an extended family,” Wells said.

—Mary Branham

Alzheimer’s, Diabetes Driving Health Care Costs

When it comes to expensive chronic diseases driving health care costs, the issue gets very personal with Alabama Sen. Vivian Davis Figures. That’s because her mother is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and her mother-in-law died from Alzheimer’s disease.

Alzheimer’s disease costs $148 billion in health care every year, said Stephen Geist, regional director for the California Southland Alzheimer’s Association.

That means someone will be diagnosed with the disease every 70 seconds—and that’s going to be an increasing burden for states to bear.

Geist said states—particularly in the Northwest—will experience an estimated 81 percent to 127 percent increase in Alzheimer’s cases in the next 15 years. Yet only 11 states currently have a state Alzheimer’s plan, according to Geist.

Along with Alzheimer’s, diabetes is also driving health care costs, according to Dr. Fran Kaufman, chief medical officer with Medtronic Inc., an associate of The Council of State Governments.

Type 2 diabetes is increasing mostly due to obesity, Kaufman said. And what’s worse, it’s a disease that requires multiple interventions, making it costly to manage.

“But if you don’t control your diabetes, your complication rate is significantly increased,” Kaufman said. Even though Type 2 diabetes can be prevented through lifestyle changes, “if we can’t prevent this, then we’ve got to have better ways to effectively manage it,” Kaufman said.

The money spent on diabetes between 2006 and 2007 nearly doubled, according to Kaufman. In 2007, $174 billion was spent on diabetes in the U.S., she said.

“This is not about me alone in a room with a patient and a family,” Kaufman said. “It’s about how to manage (and) whether someone lives a healthy lifestyle and has access to good health care.”

—Mikel Chavers

States Tackle OPEB Obligations

California is facing massive budget problems by any measure. And among the major problems it faces is a $100 billion liability in its public retirement plans, said Jason Dickerson, principal fiscal and policy analyst, California Legislative Analyst’s Office.

The state has worked with the California Highway Patrol union toward a plan in which officers will pay into the California Public Employee Retirement System—or CALPERS—trust fund in an effort to address some of the unfunded liability for that group. It won’t cover all of the annual required contribution, however, he said.

Many states face difficult decisions on how to fund pension and other post-employment benefits, known as OPEBs.

Utah, for instance, has addressed state employees’ OPEBs in an innovative way. The state uses a formula to take an employee’s accrued sick leave to come up with an amount that will go into a health reimbursement account for that employee. That plan replaces the previous benefit in which the state paid the employees’ full monthly health insurance premium.

—Mary Branham