

**THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS  
RESOLUTION ON A KEY NATIONAL INDICATOR SYSTEM FOR  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Resolution Summary**

Our society faces multiple systemic crises, requiring unprecedented collaboration among stakeholders and across levels and sectors, with enormous stakes and little time. Public officials, civic leaders, and concerned citizens are eager to gain easier access to objective, trusted sources of information on how their nation, state or city is really doing. They want to cut through biased agendas and find reliable facts for more productive public dialogue and action on a broad range of issues: Are our cities safe and secure? Are we getting the best education and health care? Are our levels of economic competitiveness, workforce development, and innovation up to global challenges? Are we providing effective stewardship of our environment?

Yet our democratic process has no widely- shared factual frame of reference to underpin problem solving and decision-making across highly interdependent issues. We do not have a freely available, easy-to-use, comprehensive source of the best and most relevant data to help American leaders and the public to understand and assess progress for themselves. Hence, choices are too often framed, discussed, and made on the basis of inadequate, hard-to-find, or incomplete data.

The solution is a key national indicator system for the United States, which the Key National Indicators Act of 2008 would create. It would unite nonprofits, the media, government decision makers, business leaders, scientists, educators, and citizens around a single goal: to deepen our *shared* knowledge and understanding of the country's most pressing issues. That learning would come from an innovative Web site – offered as a public service – so that Americans can get the best available facts on their nation's or state's status drawn from the country's most respected statistical sources. The site will be easy to use and continually updated so that people can find and share credible, relevant data in minutes or hours. It will rely on input and quality assurance from the National Academy of Sciences and partnerships with leading statistical data providers.

The Key National Indicators Act of 2008 embodies an historic opportunity to change forever the way our whole society learns and holds itself accountable for progress. It can have wide-ranging social impact, showing what we do and don't know in areas of significant change or debate. It can highlight whether progress is or is not being made. It can enhance the ability of audiences to probe complex issues. It can enhance collaboration and problem solving by providing information that can help find and reinforce common ground in areas of emerging consensus. Ultimately, this resource will help the nation to set a new global standard for what an open democratic society stands for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Summary of The Key National Indicators Act of 2008

The Key National Indicators Act, as introduced in 2008, would establish the first ever key national indicator system for the United States. Hundreds of central input, output, and outcome measures for dozens of major issues will be supported by the best quality statistical data and made available to millions of Americans through a free, easily accessible Web service – as well as to federal, state and local policy-makers. Currently, there is no single, interactive, trusted source that is widely accessible by the public. Without this resource, the nation is severely hindered from full understanding of emerging systemic risks and whether progress is being made on multiple crises. It is a highly economical investment to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of multi-trillion spending on short, medium, and long-term problems. The authorization for this bill is \$77.5 million over ten years - \$10 million in the first fiscal year, and \$7.5 million per year thereafter.

The bill would establish a Congressional Commission on Key National Indicators, which would analyze past research and practice and review reports from the National Academy of Sciences, GAO, and other relevant entities to assess the role of a new national indicators system. The Commission will be comprised of eight members – two appointed by the Senate Majority Leader, two appointed by the Senate Minority Leader, two appointed by the House Speaker, and two appointed by the House Minority Leader. After the selection of the two Co-Chairpersons and the Executive Director of the Commission, the Co-chairs will enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to convene a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary roundtable to define major scientific and technical issues associated with developing, maintaining, and evolving a national indicators system. The National Academy of Sciences will then establish the key national indicator system by either creating its own institutional capability or partnering with an independent private nonprofit organization – as an Institute – to implement the system. The Academy or the Institute would be responsible for the following:

- Identifying and selecting issue areas to be measured by key national indicators;
- Designing, publishing, and maintaining a public Web site that contains a freely accessible database to the American public, with a quality assurance framework;
- Developing a budget for the construction and management of a sustainable and evolving key national indicator system and reporting annually to the Commission.

The Commission will submit annual reports to the U.S. Congress, the President, and the National Academy of Sciences. The General Accounting Office (GAO) will conduct a) an initial study of previous work done on creating a key national indicators system and b) an annual financial audit and biannual programmatic assessments.

### **Additional Resource Information**

Forum on Key National Indicators: Assessing the Nation's Position and Progress (Government Accountability Office - GAO)

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-03-672SP>

GAO Report to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-1>

GAO Recommendation to the US Congress

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-07-235R>

Recent New York Times Op-Ed

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/opinion/24dubenstein.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/opinion/24dubenstein.html?_r=1)

The Key National Indicators Act of 2008 (Legislative Language – Attached)

### **CSG Management Directives**

**Management Directive #1:** CSG will support efforts in the U.S. Congress to create a key national indicator system for the United States as soon as possible through the enactment of legislation such as the Key National Indicators Act of 2008. Prompt action is needed given the many interrelated issues the nation is facing, the large amounts of public and private expenditure involved, and the need to create conditions of transparency and accountability across multiple levels of government and multiple sectors of U.S. society.

**Management Directive #2:** CSG will seek to educate and increase states' collaboration with each other and with the federal statistical agencies to provide the highest quality data for the American people. This collaboration will include issues ranging from technology transfer and data harmonization, to information quality definitions and standards.

**Management Directive #3:** CSG will actively promote efforts by states to contribute to and take advantage of a key national indicator system and to develop their own key state indicator systems within the context of that system. To this end, CSG will work within the context of its existing efforts in the area of performance measurement to support the implementation and evolution of state indicator systems.

## THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

### RESOLUTION ON A KEY NATIONAL INDICATOR SYSTEM FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**WHEREAS**, the American people and their leaders have a substantial interest in readily available, comprehensive, and unbiased information on key indicators to assess their position and progress on issues at the national, state, and local levels; in a rapidly evolving global economy, the capacity for a nation or a state to assess its progress is a substantial competitive advantage; and the nation's schools, businesses, governments, and others are striving to cultivate a more numerate, literate, and engaged citizenry; and

**WHEREAS**, vast repositories of data exist in public agencies at all levels; the American taxpayer funds and cooperates in producing this statistical data; accessing and using this information is far too difficult to be widely useful to the public; however, rapidly evolving technologies have created new opportunities at relatively low cost for the public to gain much easier access to high quality data on the state of the nation and states from a single source; and

**WHEREAS**, key indicator systems are flourishing in communities, cities, counties, and regions across the country; state level systems are emerging, and it is the intent of state governments to increase the information at the disposal of policy makers and the public to make better informed choices given limited resources but needed investments; and the economies of scale from federal government investment would inure directly to support the creation of state level systems; and

**WHEREAS**, a key national indicator system has been extensively researched and recommended to Congress by the Government Accountability Office (GAO); furthermore, the National Academy of Sciences has been involved in planning, research, development, and advisory activities relating to the establishment of a key national indicator system; and there is wide bipartisan support for the idea of a key national indicator system;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Council of State Governments calls on the U.S. Congress to seize an historic opportunity and pass adequately funded legislation to create such a key national indicator system, such as the Key National Indicators Act of 2008, as soon as possible; and wants to emphasize that defining, measuring, and communicating about progress effectively is a central, not a peripheral consideration, for every major issue the nation faces.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Council of State Governments believes that states must be assured a significant role in the development, evolution, and implementation of such a system.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Council of State Governments will seek to partner with organizations that share our philosophy about the need for this act of public leadership.

Adopted this \_\_\_\_Day of November, 2009 at the CSG Annual Conference in La Quinta, California

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Governor Joe Manchin III, West Virginia  
2009 CSG President

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Sen. Bart Davis, Idaho  
2009 CSG Chair