Western Legislative Academy Class Takes Home Lessons in Leadership and Democracy

Mary Lou Cooper

"Short words are best. And the old words, when short, are best of all." Winston Churchill's language of leadership was one of many lessons taught at CSG-WEST's inaugural Western Legislative Academy. Author and actor James Humes portrayed Churchill.

Thirty-eight Western legislators from 13 Western states and Guam gathered August 1-4 to hear Humes and a faculty that included scholars, legislative practitioners, media and media experts, a time management specialist, a professional mediator-negotiator and U.S. Air Force trainers. The goal of the three and a half-day Academy was to help legislators, many of whom are in their first or second terms, become more effective members of their legislative bodies.

The Council of State Governments-WEST (CSG-WEST) established the Academy in response to increased turnover caused by term limits and the retirement of experienced members of Western legislatures. Admission to the Academy was competitive, based on commitment to public service, desire to improve personal legislative effectiveness and interest in improving the legislative process.

Thanks to the generous support of the El Pomar Foundation, the Academy was held on the grounds of the foundation's retreat center at the historic Penrose House in Colorado Springs, Colorado. El Pomar is dedicated to the recognition and promotion of excellence in nonprofit organizations.

Nevada Assemblywoman Barbara Cegavske was elected president of the first Western Legislative Academy class. Looking back at her experience Cegavske said, "We learned a great deal about ourselves as leaders and about the value of building bridges across our personal landscapes." And she added, "I hope our class will take on the challenge of reminding our legislative colleagues and constituents why representative democracy itself is as valuable to our system now as it was 250 years ago."

This issue of Western Legislatures is devoted entirely to the stories and photos from CSG-WEST's first Western Legislative Academy. For information about how to apply for the Academy in 2001, call CSG-WEST at 505-424-3322 or 415-974-6422.
Chair's Letter: New Academy Helps Build Strong Legislatures

Senator Ray Powers
President, Colorado State Senate

This issue of Western Legislatures is about the Western Legislative Academy (WLA), which convened August 1-4, 2000 at the El Pomar Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Based on the responses of the participants during and after the event, it was tremendously successful as a learning experience and as an opportunity to build networks across state lines.

The legislative and professional development faculty was superb in imparting experience and insights gained from distinguished careers. The segments on time management, coalition building in legislative bodies and media relations were also among the most highly graded sessions. The training on leadership styles at the U.S. Air Force Academy was also a highlight. A recurring theme was the importance of the legislative institution and the obligation of legislators to leave it stronger than when they entered.

We are also grateful for our sponsors for their support of our inaugural class. They are listed below, and we thank them for backing this new CSG- WEST initiative. A special thanks goes to the staff and fellows of the El Pomar Center whose assistance in implementing the Academy was invaluable.

I particularly want to mention the support of my good friend Bill Hybl, Chairman of the El Pomar Foundation. Bill recognized early on as a former Colorado state legislator the value of this program and its fit with the foundation’s own mission to support excellence in nonprofit and nonpartisan organizations. As a long-time resident of Colorado Springs, I was extremely proud of the way my community was presented to the WLA participants from all 13 Western states and the Pacific island of Guam.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the officers and Executive Committee of CSG-WEST who had the vision to see that such a program was needed as hundreds of years of legislator experience walks out the door in our term-limited region. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to the CSG-WEST staff who had the confidence to make it happen.

Senator Ray Powers
Colorado Senate President
CSG-WEST Chair

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The Council of State Governments-WEST (CSG-WEST) is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization committed to providing a platform for regional cooperation and collaboration among Western state legislatures.

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Working with the Capitol Gang

Cheryl Lee Duvauchelle

As a part of the effectiveness training for newer lawmakers at the Western Legislative Academy, a “capitol gang” panel - made up of a newspaper reporter, lobbyist, governor’s liaison and a legislative chief of staff - offered participants insights from other key players on the capitol scene. Oregon House Speaker Pro Tem Ken Strobeck, moderator of the panel, creatively kicked off the session with a hypothetical situation that could easily happen in any state legislature.

The Hypothetical Situation
Rep. Frank Trueheart is a three-term member of the House of Representatives. He chairs the Education Committee and is a close friend of Governor Stillmore, who enjoys a reputation as the “Education Governor.” Rep. Trueheart is an outspoken advocate of public education and has been heard on numerous occasions saying that public education is the backbone of society. A reporter from Trueheart’s local newspaper, the Daily Planet, learns that Trueheart’s two children are enrolled in an exclusive private school. The reporter hints that Trueheart is a hypocrite and asks why the public schools aren’t good enough for Trueheart’s children.

The Responses
Panelists were asked to stick to their respective roles as they responded to Trueheart with advice in less than two minutes.

Governor’s Liaison Role played by Marty Brown, Director of Policy in the Office of the Governor of Washington: First, I prepare my boss, the Governor, for any questions he might get on the matter. We would emphasize the Governor’s record and Rep. Trueheart’s “public” record. We would develop a response that respects the Representative’s personal and family choices while recognizing his commitment to improving the educational opportunities of all children. We would reiterate the Governor’s commitment to educational excellence in our state. Privately, we might suggest that Rep. Trueheart, and/or his spouse, volunteer in their local public schools.

Journalist role played by Carl Hilliard, recently retired Capitol Press Corps Member of the Associated Press, Denver Bureau: I make it a rule-of-thumb never to befriend, on a personal basis, anyone whose conduct might require me to write something critical about them in the future. It’s a good thing to remember that “editors have no friends.” If I were to advise Rep. Trueheart, I’d tell him to state publicly that it is not against the law to send one’s offspring to private schools. Although I would not promise him favorable coverage in the wake of the incident, I would note that in the past he was an advocate for public education and had never taken a position against private schools.

Lobbyist role played by Susan Good, Montana Lobbyist and Former Legislator: My advice to Rep. Trueheart is to avoid the debate about public versus private education and answer the question the way he wished it had been asked. I’d tell him to take advantage of any opportunity he had to remind his constituents of hisstellar voting record in support of public education, advocating that every child can have the advantages of the best education possible, whether public or private. Most of all, I’d tell him not to get mired in the merits of either system.

Partisan staff role played by Anne Murray, Chief of Staff to the Speaker of the New Mexico House: If I had worked for Rep. Trueheart, I would have strongly encouraged him to bleed and die over a different issue, perhaps prison reform or Indian gambling. However, already in the situation, I would recommend that he consider this a perfect opportunity to whole-heartedly embrace school vouchers, promoting school choice, accountability and competition in the education process.

This challenging scenario introduced the capitol gang panel to Academy participants. It was only a preview of candid presentations from each panelist on how to strengthen working relationships with other professionals on the legislative scene.

Montana lobbyist (and former legislator) Susan Good voices strong opinions on how to build productive and appropriate working relationships between lawmakers and lobbyists.

Western Legislatures Fall 2000
Time management consultant Pam Vaccaro (Designs on Time, St. Louis) tells class members that they need to update their planning tactics to accommodate the demands of the new information age.

U.S. Air Force Major Danny Miller teaches group dynamics to WLA lawmakers using many of the same adventure-based learning techniques he applies to cadets and military officers. The day at the Air Force Academy learning leadership and team playing skills was a highlight.

Churchill scholar James C. Humes wraps up the Western Legislative Academy with lessons in the language of leadership. Humes stayed in the costume and character of Sir Winston throughout his performance.

Washington D.C. media consultant Arch Lustberg may look like your grandfather, but he acts more like TV reporter Mike Wallace when he teaches communication skills.
Back Row (left to right)

Middle Row (left to right)

Front Row (left to right)

Not pictured Marco Antonio Firebaugh (CA Asmbr.), Mary Helen Garcia (NM Rep.), Linda Evans Parlette (WA Rep.)
Indoors and Outdoors Lawmakers Polish Skills

This group of WLA participants celebrates mastery of “focus and commitment,” two key elements necessary to accomplish group tasks successfully.

Teamwork looked easy until lawmakers realized how fast they had to move to pass an “egg” (or a bill) from legislator to legislator without dropping it. Practice made perfect—almost.

CSG-WEST Executive Director Kent Briggs introduces Phil Burgess, former president of the Center for the New West. Burgess gave the class an overview of the economic and demographic forces shaping Western states at the beginning of the 21st century.

Gary Wilken (Alaska Sen.) and Vicki Walker (Oregon Rep.) “take five” during a morning break. Legislators said networking with colleagues across state borders was one of the most valuable experiences offered by the Academy.
In the classroom, legislators take part in an intense discussion about the top three issues from their legislative sessions. Rep. Carolyn Edmonds (Washington) makes a point.

Listen up legislators! Air Force instructor Miller randomly divides the class into leaders, workers and liaisons. Each group is given a vital mission, but until communications connected the three teams, no one could get the job done.


WLA class members find out that being blindfolded isn't all that different from those times when they feel “in the dark” during legislative sessions.
Come on team! Let's take this hill. What hill? Who cares? One team of Academy participants forges the bonds necessary to accomplish yet another assignment from Air Force instructors.

Mary Helen Garcia (New Mexico Rep.) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska Rep.) swap opinions during a break. Learning different approaches to similar state problems was one of the informal benefits of the Academy.

Classmates Lola Spradley (Colorado Rep.), Carl Miller (Colorado Rep.) and Jim Dyer (Colorado Sen.) chat about issues back home.

Who says deciphering personalities is a picnic? Academy members take a test to find out if their personal style shows a pattern of dominance, influence, conscientiousness or steadiness (DISC). The profiling was designed to help lawmakers work better with people of varying personalities.
John Bohlinger (Montana Sen.) and Linda Evans Parlette (Washington Rep.) demonstrate that “open faces” make good communicators during one practical training session.

First write down what you learned today. Then everyone - all 38 of you - stand on the tarp together. Now flip the tarp over completely without ever stepping off. Air Force trainers expected a lot from the Class of 2000, and they met the challenge.

Okay gang. Move that can of “radioactive” waste in the middle of the circle to another location. And don’t drop it or you’ll contaminate yourself and the area around you. Academy participants quickly learned that teamwork was as important as leadership while doing this task.

Rep. Pete Illowy (Wyoming) engages a llama in conversation about the WLA experience. Although Illowy and the llama aren’t the same personality types, they appear to get along just fine.
Scholars and Lawmakers Look at Representative Democracy

Mary Lou Cooper

In the very first hours of the Western Legislative Academy, participants heard from a panel of academics who reviewed the question: Are legislatures under scrutiny and under siege at the beginning of the 21st Century? The answer was a resounding “yes” from university lecturers across the nation. Anecdotes from participants added to the consensus.

Academics Evaluate Today’s Legislatures
Kicking off the discussion on the state of state legislatures was Alan Rosenthal, professor of public policy at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. Rosenthal is widely known for a lifetime of award-winning work on state legislatures and the author of numerous publications including his 1998 book Is Representative Democracy in Decline? Rosenthal, who has pronounced representative democracy sick but not terminal, challenged Academy participants to educate the public about the value of what they do, primarily because he doesn’t see anyone else doing it, certainly not the press. He sees representative democracy as under siege not only from the media but also from term limits, greater constituent pressure and weakening personal relationships inside legislatures—to name only a few villains.

Boise State University Professor Gary Moncrief next tackled the question of why the old statehouse “ain’t” like it used to be. Moncrief has studied state legislatures for many years and is especially known for his studies on who runs for legislative office today, how legislators view their jobs and legislative workloads. He talked about the changes in Western legislatures in the past few decades and the impact of term limits on the West.

Tim Hodson, Executive Director of the Center for California Studies at California State University in Sacramento, was given the unenviable task of answering the question: “Are Legislators Shooting Themselves in the Foot?” As the “bad cop” on the panel, Hodson touched on the impacts of negative campaigning, putting partisanship above the good of the institution, ethical considerations and other matters that sometimes contribute to the erosion of public confidence in state legislators and their institutions.

Is direct democracy in the form of ballot measures a threat to representative democracy?
Brigham Young University Professor of Political Science David Magleby thinks so and urged Academy participants to consider the consequences. Magleby is a leading authority on the impact of ballot issues on state legislatures. As the author of the book Direct Legislation: Voting on Ballot Propositions in the United States, the BYU professor says that the proliferation of ballot measures is especially prevalent in Western states and most definitely a threat to the authority of state legislatures.

Participants Tackle a Case Study
California Senator Patrick Johnston moderated this panel and afterwards led a practical case study in representative democracy. After randomly dividing Academy participants into four groups, Johnston asked participants to consider a hypothetical legislative situation relating to a motorcycle helmet bill. The bill’s chief sponsor was the mythical Senator Safer, and the chief opponents were former Governor Frelov, Governor Whaas up, and of course Senator Harley.

Participants were asked to answer questions ranging from what strategies would a successful lawmaker use to enact the legislation to how much compromise is necessary or desirable to win passage. Although the nature of the case made role playing a challenge, each group was able to develop a consensus report and present it to the class.
Lessons in Conflict and Compromise

Pat Joyce

Amidst laughter and anecdotes about Governor Jesse Ventura, Minnesota Senator Kiscaden briefed Academy participants on the keys to consensus inside state legislatures. Kiscaden is a professional mediator and negotiator who brings her job skills to the Minnesota Legislature.

Conflict, said Kiscaden, is the big issue in state legislatures. Every legislator has to deal with it throughout his or her term—with party members, with colleagues and with constituents. Unfortunately, when an issue reaches the highest point of conflict, that’s when legislators usually get called in to resolve the problem.

Despite the natural conflicts of policymaking, the process is designed to produce compromise. Kiscaden identified five tools sometimes used to reach compromise—deflection, deliberation, negotiation, bargaining and fighting it out!

To be successful legislators, she said, you must know your own and your colleagues’ strengths and weaknesses. Time spent understanding these two components will save time and unnecessary conflict in the negotiation process. You must recognize which of the following words most accurately describes you and your colleagues—cooperator, collaborator, conflict avoider or competitor. And then you must deal with each other accordingly.

Knowing your own strengths and shortcomings is the best tool to survive the pressure of being a public servant, advised Kiscaden. Is your behavior rigid? Are you intrusive? Irresolute? Aloof? What kind of message does your behavior send to other legislators? Do they know how to react to you?

Negotiation is probably the most frequently used tool of the trade for legislators inside your own caucus, with your constituents and with members on the other side of the aisle. It is this back and forth communication that is needed to reach an agreement. Kiscaden offered the following tips for successful negotiations:

1. Remember at the outset that negotiations should produce a wise agreement that demonstrates efficiency;
2. Negotiations should improve relations between the parties involved; and
3. Most importantly, remember that negotiations are about the ISSUES not PEOPLE. Take the personalities out of the situation and stay focused on the point at hand.

Kiscaden reminded Academy participants that the public is much less partisan than legislators. The public only wants resolution and does not care which party gets the credit.

In addition to remarks about the importance of building consensus within the legislature, Kiscaden also commented on the changing world of state legislators today. She pointed out that the average legislator is expected to handle a highly expanded workload compared to members of yesteryear. Lawmakers must learn to accomplish that work in a much shorter time frame due to term limits. Kiscaden also noted that legislators must deal with more special interest groups today as well as more input from their own party’s policy interests. She added that public scrutiny has increased due to the availability of news through electronic media.

What should newer legislators do in this context of running harder to accomplish more in a shorter period of time? First and foremost, Kiscaden told participants to “get a mentor.” Legislators don’t have time anymore to learn everything they need to know about their jobs. Newer lawmakers must find someone they respect and trust to guide them through the maze of their respective state legislatures.

Pat Joyce is the Northwest Policy Services Manager for CSG-WEST.

Nevada Asmbr. Barbara Cegavske (left) and Minnesota Sen. Sheila Kiscaden (right) share a moment outside of class. WLA instructor Kiscaden gave Academy participants tips on creating win-win policies from her experience as a professional mediator and negotiator. Cegavske was elected president of the WLA Class of 2000.
Veteran Legislators Share “Insider” Lessons

Mary Lou Cooper

A panel of veteran Western legislators offers “insider” ideas to Western Legislative Academy members on how to become more effective. From left to right: Danice Picraux (New Mexico House Maj. Whip), Joe Quilici (Montana former Whip and Committee Chair), Kate Brown (Oregon Sen. Min. Leader) and Norma Anderson (Colorado Sen. and former House Maj. Leader). Not pictured is moderator Lynn Hettrick (Nevada Asmbr. Min. Leader).

CSG-WEST called on four veteran Western state legislators to speak to newer Western colleagues attending the Western Legislative Academy about how to be more effective on the job. Nevada House Minority Leader Lynn Hettrick moderated the panel, and topics ranged from knowing how to pick your battles to healing the wounds after you’ve won them.

New Mexico House Majority Whip Danice Picraux drew the toughest assignment when she was asked to talk about the nuts and bolts of being effective—things like counting votes and coordinating your strategy before you ever get to the committee room or floor. Montana Rep. Joe Quilici based his discussion of how to work with governors regardless of party affiliation on his 30 years as both a majority and minority member.

Oregon Senate Minority Leader Kate Brown shared several stories from her own book of legislative experience as she tackled the subject of how critical personal relations are inside the legislature, especially with those on the opposite side of the aisle where issue differences can cause problems. Colorado Senator and former House Majority Leader Norma Anderson wrapped up the panel with ideas on formulating the big picture strategies that are necessary to be a successful lawmaker.

Sen. Powers opens his Colorado Springs home to WLA members for a cookout.