Why should state legislators take care of legislative institutions? How can lawmakers say “no” and still feel like decent legislators? What’s the best way to find common ground in the legislative arena? What’s news and how can you get positive coverage of legislative stories? Why is it so much harder to govern than to campaign? Why isn’t everybody more like me? Why isn’t it enough to just do what the law says when it comes to ethics? How can lawmakers make memorable speeches and handle tough interviews?

The answers to these and other perplexing questions were discussed by legislators and experts when the 2008 Western Legislative Academy convened for three and half days of intensive classes November 17-20 in Colorado Springs. The goal: To build stronger legislators and stronger state legislative institutions.

In a competitive process involving essay questions and letters of recommendation, 35 legislative “students” were selected to attend the most prestigious legislative training academy in the West. All lawmakers at the Academy are still in their first four years of service and have returned to their respective legislatures to serve in 2009.

The campus for the WLA is the historic Penrose House, home of the El Pomar Foundation for nonprofits. El Pomar has been a leading contributor to the WLA since its inception in 2000. Now in its ninth year, WLA boasts 335 alumni, many of whom go on to leadership positions in their chambers, caucuses and committees. Two alumni now serve in the U.S. Senate and three serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

An outstanding faculty drawn from the private sector, the military, journalism, academia and state legislatures taught core subjects designed to improve legislative skills. Classes included time management, the history of legislative institutions, negotiations, the art of public decision making, ethics and communications. A full afternoon was spent at the U.S. Air Force Academy working on personality profiles and team building.

Alaska Senator Lesil McGuire, 2008 Council of State Governments-WEST chair, presided over this year’s WLA. CSG-WEST is a nonpartisan, nonprofit association serving Western state legislators.

The 2009 Western Legislative Academy will take place August 5-8. Applications are due March 2 and may be found at www.csgwest.org or call 916-553-4423. Participation is limited to Western legislators still in their first four years of service.
Although Arizona Representative Steve Farley says state legislators are just “regular” people, he’s undoubtedly one of the more unique members of the species.

The 46-year-old artist and graphic designer is perhaps best known for turning photos of the Tucson community into historic tile murals using a tile making process that he invented.

He’s also worked on public art projects across the U.S. in such places as Minneapolis, Rhode Island and Cuyahoga National Park near Cleveland. Before Farley started his own small business, Stephen Farley Design, he spent four years in the art department of the San Francisco Bay Guardian.

Just how does being an artist relate to legislative work? The distance between the two professions is not as far as one might think. Farley points out that “I’m not just an artist—I’m a public artist.” As such, he engages with the public at every level from “selling” proposals to getting public input to executing projects on time and under budget. Time spent on design is only about five percent of the effort, while 95 percent of the work is politics and project management…not unlike legislative work.

When asked what lessons he’s learned as a newer lawmaker that he’d like to pass along to those coming behind him, Farley said humility was high on his list—the sense that while the election may be about how great you are, governing is just regular people trying to get things done for the public good. He said newer lawmakers need to get to know the people with whom they disagree. Farley acknowledges that it’s difficult and that “I’m as guilty as anybody” when it comes to not always loving one’s enemies. He suggests it’s important for lawmakers to treat each other as human beings rather than symbols of what they dislike.

Farley also has a wish list for veteran legislators. Leaders on both sides, he says, “should allow every member to get one bill heard even if the leaders oppose the bill. It’s important for us all to realize that every person is elected by a constituency that deserves to be heard.” Too many bills are introduced in legislatures, he says, and that leaves a lot of important bills tossed aside.

When he’s not in Phoenix at the legislature, Farley is working in his design studio in Tucson. As a single Dad with two girls, his biggest challenge is the split life he lives as a lawmaker. “You want to be a good Dad, an effective legislator and a successful businessman.” The choices are tough, says Farley. When he needs to take a break, Farley likes to cook, camp, fish, ride a bike and take long road trips with his girls.

Reflecting back on his Western Legislative Academy experience, Farley said: “Sometimes we legislators feel alone in our struggles to improve the lives of our constituents in the context of an often confusing and sometimes disheartening legislative process. WLA made me feel a part of a larger team of citizen legislators of both parties, sharing those struggles.”

Other lawmakers who have been elected by their WLA class members to serve as presidents are: New Mexico Rep. Thomas Garcia (07), Idaho Rep. Rich Wills (06), Nevada Asmbr. Heidi Gansert (05), New Mexico Rep. Jose Campos (04), Nevada Asmbr. Kelvin Atkinson (03), Montana Sen. Jim Keane (02), Alaska Sen. Lesil McGuire (01) and Nevada Asmbr. Barbara Cegavske (00.)

Special appreciation to the El Pomar Foundation and Penrose House who play a large role in the success of the CSG-WEST Western Legislative Academy. The Foundation’s ongoing investment in the WLA helps newer western legislators acquire the skills and networks to be more effective policy makers. The campus environment created by the Penrose House provides a place where participants can step away from their busy lives and immerse themselves in intensive skill building classes. El Pomar fellows serve as evaluators of the WLA and are an unbiased resource for course corrections in the curriculum.
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Time management expert Pam Vaccaro gives legislators quick tips and real change strategies to help organize their busy lives.

Master negotiator, attorney and former Nebraska Senator David Landis taught interactive lessons in negotiations in the legislative arena.

Denver NBC political reporter Adam Schrager helped lawmakers understand what makes news and how to draw attention to their statehouse stories.

WLA 2007 Class President New Mexico Representative Thomas Garcia returns to welcome the Class of 2008.

Jack Marshall delivers ethics lessons based on real-life cases.
Rutgers University Professor Alan Rosenthal (left) facilitates a discussion on Taking Care of the Legislative Institution with Alaska House Minority Leader Beth Kerttula and Idaho Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis.

Communications coach Arch Lustberg reminds lawmakers that stories are more memorable than statistics.

Legislative scholar and Boise State Political Science Professor Gary Moncrief reviews the history of the last 50 years of state legislatures.


Ret. Air Force Lt. Col. Danny Miller administered personality assessments and engaged lawmakers in some of the same team building exercises offered to officers and cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Governing expert Dr. Phillip Boyle helps legislators build a framework for public decision making.
ALASKA
Rep. John Coghill, Jr.-02
Fmr. Rep. Eric Croft-00
Fmr. Nancy Dahlstrom-04
Fmr. Anna Fairclough-08
Fmr. Hugh “Bud” Fate-02
Rep. Carl Gatto-06
Sen. Steve Kitchen-Guess-01
Rep. David Guttenberg-04
Rep. John Harris-00
Fmr. Rep. Jim Holm-03
Rep. Lindsey Holmes-08
Sen. Charlie Huggins-05
Rep. Creston-08
Mike Kelly-05
Sen. Lesli McGuire-01
Sen. Kevin Meyer-02
U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski-00
Fmr. Rep. Mary Nelson-02
Rep. Mark Neuman-07
Rep. Kurt Olson-05
Fmr. Rep. Ralph Samuels-03
Fmr. Paul Seaton-04
Fmr. Sen. Ralph Seekins-04
Sen. Bert Stedman-06
Rep. Stevens-01
Rep. William A. Thomas Jr.-06
Sen. Thomas Wanamaker-03
Sen. Gary Wilkens-00
Rep. Peggy Wilson-01

ARIZONA
Sen. Paula-07
Rep. Olivia Cajori Bedford-03
Fmr. Sen. Pres. Tim Bee-02
Rep. Mike Causer-03
Sen. John Cavaiani-08
Rep. Martin Fuentes-08
Rep. David Gowan-08
Rep. Steve Farley-08
Rep. Mark Kelly-05
Rep. Steve Farley-08
Rep. Robert Farley-08
Rep. Jose Hidalgo-08
Rep. Noel Judd-08
Rep. Rusty Madsen-08
Rep. Dave McSally-08
Rep. Don Shooter-08
Rep. David Stringer-08
Rep. Javi Villada-08
Rep. John Vazquez-08
Rep. Adam Driggs-07
Fmr. Sen. Pres. Tim Bee-02
Rep. Olivia Cajero Bedford-03

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Rep. Al Heflin-03
Rep. Mike Johnston-03
Rep. Tom Jackson-03
Rep. Adam Kavinsky-03
Sen. Karen Handel-03
Rep. Stephen Harrison-03
Sen. Tom Udall-03
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