On July 30th the Westrends Board convened its second session during the CSG West Virtual Annual Meeting, which was a roundtable conversation on state executive emergency powers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The session was aimed at having members share how their governors and legislatures have responded to the crisis, including the interactions between the executive and legislative branches. Each member was provided 3-4 minutes to make verbal presentations. Below are highlights of the presentations.

**Alaska**
Senator Gary Stevens shared that, overall, the legislature has had a good relationship with the governor during this interim. He stated that some of the challenges and concerns shared by the legislature have been on executive branch’s speed to distribute federal CARES Act funds. Another challenge has been figuring out how to operate under these new conditions, including the development of rules to maintain continuity in state government while adhering to health guidance and directives.

**Colorado**
Senate Assistant Majority Leader Rhonda Fields shared that Colorado was dealing with the ongoing trauma of the pandemic. The legislature recessed for eight weeks then returned, at which point it was facing a major budget deficit. Senator Fields talked about the different actions the legislature has taken to protect people and businesses, including enhancing testing, extending health benefits through telehealth, unemployment support, and reducing regulations. She also talked about Governor Polis’ executive order to address economic recovery in the state as well as relief programs, especially for vulnerable populations and essential workers that have been significantly affected by the pandemic. Senator Fields also talked about the collaboration between state government and the business community.
**Hawaii**

House Majority Leader Representative Della Au Belatti stated that the legislature had a healthy relationship with the governor during the pandemic. She stated that in March House Speaker Scott Saiki convened a COVID Committee comprised of industry leaders, economists, legislators and other stakeholders to think through issues and strategies to address the pandemic. Representative Au Belatti shared that the committee has been an important vehicle to collaborate and move state government to respond to the pandemic. While the relationship between the two branches was good, Representative Au Belatti talked about the healthy tension between the branches given the substantial authority that the governor has to disperse CARES Act funds, which sometimes varies from how the legislature may have desired. She stated that the Governor would be cutting some line items that the House had sought in the budget. She also expressed concern about the speed in which the administration moved to utilize CARES Act funds and in establishing priorities.

**Idaho**

Representative Rick Youngblood talked about some of the challenges the legislature has had with the governor during the pandemic. He stated that much of the activities related to the state’s response had been generated by the governor’s executive orders, which have caused issues, particularly since they have not had a special session. Representative Youngblood stated that the Senate President Pro Tempore and Speaker had sent letters to committee chairs to identify issues that could be part of a special session, including limitations on liabilities for schools and businesses during the pandemic, and extending primary dates. He stated that an advisory committee had been established to provide input, particularly on the spending of non-cognizable funds in the amount of $9.5 million.
Montana
Representative Moffie Funk stated that the legislature had not been in session this year as it meets every other year. She said that there has been minimal push back by the legislature on the governor’s actions in responding to the pandemic. Overall, there is a sense that the governor got on top of the situation quickly, including a shelter in place order. By May there was a gradual reopening of the economy. Two weeks ago the governor issued an order requiring face coverings for all counties. Overall, Representative Funk stated that that they were in a good position to withstand the anticipated fiscal challenges due to strong budget reserves.

Oregon
Representative Barbara Smith Warner stated that despite the challenges thus far they were in a stable financial situation due to its reserves. Representative Smith Warner talked about the short session that the legislature convened earlier in the year. She shared that a joint committee on COVID had been established. The governor did much of the work via executive orders and called the legislature into a special session at the end of June. The special session reinforced what the governor had done in response to the pandemic, however, it also addressed other issues such as legislation aimed at dismantling structural racism and police reforms. Representative Smith Warner stated that CARES Act funding has been distributed widely to individuals and businesses across the state. She stated that they might soon go into another special session.

Washington
Senator Randi Becker stated that they too had short session and talked about some of the challenges they have had. The governor has two important tools during an emergency - waiving statutory obligations and open-ended proclamations which must be renewed every thirty days. Senator Becker stated that the renewal of the proclamations, which require engagement of the leadership of both the House and Senate, have taken up a lot of time. While many good things have been done through the executive proclamations, Senator Becker expressed that there are concerns about the constitutional and economic consequences of the orders. She stated that the Republican caucus has written 20 letters asking for clarification on the proclamations and have only received three responses. They have also asked for special session to address the
economic impacts of the pandemic, however, none has been called to date. Senator Becker stated that they have a major budget deficit (approximately $8.8 billion) which will require the state to tap into its rainy-day funds to close the budget gap. She stated that legislators need to be proactive in adhering to their oversight roles and closely scrutinize the broad authority that is provided to governors during an emergency.

**Wyoming**

Representative Andy Schwartz stated that the governor has broad authority during a declared emergency. Among these was the distribution of federal CARES Act funds. Representative Schwartz shared that the Wyoming Legislature had convened a special session that primarily focused on providing relief for businesses during the pandemic and dealing with workers’ compensation. He also talked about expected reductions in state revenues, possibly thirty percent, due to the decrease in oil and gas price which are a significant source of revenue for the state. Despite these challenges, Representative Schwartz shared that the state had done a good job to save funds on reserves in recent years. He also stated that the governor was going to start cutting agency budgets, with anticipated initial cuts of 20 percent.

After the presentations, the members of the Board engaged in open discussion and questions. This included discussions on how legislatures have conducted business during the pandemic, managing remote sessions, rules on social distancing and face coverings, public engagement and lessons learned.