A record number of Western legislators applied for a limited number of places at the 2005 Western Legislative Academy. WLA is the premier training program offered by the Council of State Governments-WEST (CSG-WEST) for newer lawmakers. The Academy convened November 15-18, 2005 in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Legislative leaders from the 13 Western states made more than 160 suggestions about potential applicants, and eventually more than 90 lawmakers applied for positions at the Academy. Because the maximum class size is 39, many highly qualified legislators could not be accommodated. Lawmakers still in their first four years of service are encouraged to apply for the 2006 WLA.

The WLA Class of 2005 looked like a microcosm of the West. Women and men, Republicans and Democrats, urban and rural lawmakers spent three and a half days together mastering some of the key “tools of the legislative trade.”

The list of occupations and positions found in the Class of 2005 included pilots, lawyers, educators, business owners, labor union members, financial advisors and community activists. The class boasted former police officers, a film producer, a firefighter, a microbrewery owner, a landscape designer, a marathon runner, a tribal leader, a research scientist and a Harley Davidson-riding oil trader, to name a few.

What these legislators had in common was the desire to improve personal legislative skills and strengthen legislative institutions.

A faculty of distinguished academics, corporate trainers, U.S. Air Force instructors and veteran legislative leaders worked with lawmakers on such skills as communications, negotiations, ethics, team building, time management and legislative effectiveness.

Since its inception in 2000, the Western Legislative Academy has graduated 224 lawmakers. Many of these WLA alumni have gone on to leadership positions in state legislatures and in the executive branch.

The 2006 Western Legislative Academy takes place June 12-15, and the deadline to apply is March 1, 2006. Click on the WLA link at www.csgwest.org to download an application. For more information, call CSG-WEST at (916) 553-4423.
She’s a mother, wife, athlete, engineer and medical practice consultant. And in her “spare” time, she’s also a freshman in the Nevada Legislature. That’s the short story on the newest Western Legislative Academy (WLA) class president, Nevada Assembly Member Heidi Gansert.

At the close of the 2005 Western Legislative Academy, class members elected Gansert to represent all 224 WLA alumni on the CSG-WEST Executive Committee. Gansert also serves on CSG-WEST’s governing board by virtue of an appointment from Nevada legislative leadership.

Gansert says her many roles outside the legislature actually helped prepare her to juggle the multitude of duties she faces as a lawmaker. For example, in her job as a medical practice consultant (her husband serves in an ER practice group), Gansert negotiated contracts with hospitals. That experience, she says, helped her become a better listener.

As an athlete who has participated in numerous triathlons and marathons, Gansert finds that keeping in shape gives her greater endurance for the long haul of the legislative session. And her engineering background gives her a comfort with numbers that comes in handy when she sits on the Ways and Means committee.

When asked if the legislature was like she expected it to be when she ran for office, Gansert says she found it to be much less contentious and less polarized than she anticipated. If there’s one thing she learned the first year, it was the importance of reaching across the political aisle to build consensus. “I talk to everyone, because everyone’s opinion is valuable.” Gansert also learned that because Nevada is a small state, one person can have a significant impact.

Looking back at the training she received at the 2005 Western Legislative Academy, Gansert says that probably the most valuable take-home lesson was the importance of time management. “I’m trying to work on my planning skills,” she says.

When she’s not legislating or working or parenting, Gansert’s favorite activities are coaching her children’s volleyball and basketball teams and biking with her husband.

Other lawmakers who have served as Western Legislative Academy presidents are Nevada Senator Barbara Cegavske, Alaska Representative Lesil McGuire, Montana Representative Jim Keane, Nevada Assembly Member Kelvin Atkinson and New Mexico Representative Jose Campos.

Special appreciation is extended to the El Pomar Foundation for its continuing financial support of the Western Legislative Academy. El Pomar also provides meeting management services and the use of the historic Penrose House in Colorado Springs as the WLA campus. El Pomar fellows participate as analysts in charge of the WLA evaluation process. CSG-WEST is grateful for the continuing partnership with the El Pomar Foundation in enhancing the leadership capacity of Western state legislatures.
WLA Class of 2005

Members of the Western Legislative Academy Class of 2005 gathered in Colorado Springs November 15-18 for intense professional development training.

Back row (left to right) Gerald Ortiz y Pino (NM Sen), Andy Olson (OR Rep), Mike Kelly (AK Rep), Kurt Olson (AK Rep), Clifford Bayer (ID Rep), Jim Riesberg (CO Rep), Tim Cosgrove (UT Rep), Derek Kilmer (WA Rep), Thomas Lubnau II (WY Rep), Charlie Huggins (AK Sen)

3rd Row (left to right) John Rusche (ID Rep), Shan S. Tsutsui (HI Sen), Larry Galizio (OR Rep), Dennis Himmelberger (MT Rep), Kyle Yamashita (HI Rep), Tim Corder (ID Sen), Charles Townsend (WY Sen), Bob Hasegawa (WA Rep), Moises Denis (NV Assm), Albert Hale (AZ Sen)

2nd Row (left to right) Lane Larson (MT Sen), Betty Komp (OR Rep), Pono Chong (HI Rep), Kermit Brown (WY Rep), David Bradley (AZ Rep), Russ Jones (AZ Rep), Elsie Amtzen (MT Rep)

1st Row (left to right) Debbie Benefield (CO Rep), Kathy McCoy (NM Rep), Lorraine Quarberg (WY Rep), Lorie Fowlke (UT Rep), Ronda Rudd Menlove (UT Rep), Joni Gutierrez (NM Rep), Judy Cibbom (WA Rep), Heidi Gansert (NV Asmbr)

Not Pictured: Barbara Bailey (WA Rep), Marilyn Kirkpatrick (NV Asmbr), John Jay Lee (NV Sen)

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CSG-WEST gratefully acknowledges the significant support provided to the Western Legislative Academy!

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The 2006 Western Legislative Academy will convene June 12-15. For information about sponsorship opportunities, please contact Cheryl Lee Duvauchelle at (415) 330-0312 or cdvuach@csg.org.
Eagleton Institute of Politics Professor Alan Rosenthal delivered a keynote address on “What Makes a Good Legislature?”

New Mexico Representative Jose Campos, 2004 WLA Class President, inspired and welcomed incoming WLA students.

Renowned speech and drama coach Arch Lustberg worked with lawmakers to develop unforgettable communication techniques.

Aaron Gould Sheinin, the national president of Capitolbeat (state capitol reporters and editors), gave lawmakers tips on working with journalists.

Pam Vaccaro, president of Designs on Time, gave legislators practical methods to prioritize, organize and balance professional and personal lives.

Corporate trainer Jim Hennig taught powerful lessons in principled negotiations.

FranklinCovey trainer Leigh Stevens taught lawmakers important lessons from the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People.”
Former Oregon House Speaker Larry Campbell (Left) and former Montana Senate Minority Leader Mike Halligan delivered lessons on the do’s and don’ts of effective legislators.

CSG-WEST’s 2005 Chair, Oregon Senate Majority Leader Kate Brown, presided over the Academy using large quantities of humor and energy to keep legislative “students” on target.

WLA 2005 graduation closed with an improvisational comedy team depicting scenes from the life of a legislator. LaughingStock Comedy Company actors from left to right are Lesley Abrams, Dean Steeves and Brendan Murphy.

Boise State University Professor Gary Moncrief reviewed 50 years of change in American state legislatures.

Using real-life case studies, ethicist Jack Marshall taught the “Secrets of Virtuous Lawmakers.”

New Heights Training and Development trainers Lt. Col. Danny Miller and Ret. Chief Master Sergeant Lisa Best conducted exercises at the Air Force Academy to help lawmakers become more skilled team builders.