They came from 13 Western states. They came from two political parties. And they came from a dazzling array of professions. They were the Western Legislative Academy (WLA) Class of 2007, and the one goal that bound them together was the desire to polish their legislative skills.

With classes in speechmaking, time management, media relations, team building, negotiations and ethics, these 37 individuals spent long days working to become more effective state legislators. The faculty included members of academia, the military, veteran legislative leaders and corporate trainers.

Boise State University professor and state legislative scholar Gary Moncrief taught lawmakers the history of state legislatures over the last 50 years. He urged legislators to respect and protect legislative institutions, especially in light of growing public distrust and increased partisanship. FranklinCovey trainer Laurie Julian helped lawmakers apply the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People to the legislative arena, and master consensus builder David Landis demonstrated how to solve legislative problems using negotiation skills.

Denver NBC political reporter Adam Schrager worked with lawmakers on getting their statehouse stories out using a fictitious case study, “Hollywood Heartache.” Ethicist and dramatist Jack Marshall delivered a provocative legislative ethics class, while renowned communications trainer Arch Lustberg left lawmakers laughing as he taught them how to conduct better media interviews and make memorable speeches. Corporate trainer Pam Vaccaro reviewed both quick fixes and real change techniques to improve time and attention management.

An afternoon spent at the U.S. Air Force Academy was a highlight of the 2007 WLA. Retired USAF Lt. Col. Danny Miller administered personality profiles to help legislators understand “why everybody isn’t just like me.” Miller engaged lawmakers in some of the same team building exercises given to cadets and officers. Wyoming Senate President John Schiffer and Nevada Senate Minority Leader Dina Titus led a session on what makes good legislators and good legislatures.

The eighth Western Legislative Academy offered by the Council of State Governments-WEST (CSG-WEST) convened in Colorado Springs November 5-8. Admission was competitive, and each Western state was allocated at least two but no more than four slots at the Academy. Since its inception in 2000, the WLA has graduated 300 Western state legislators. Many Academy alumni have gone on to become leaders in their legislatures and in state government. Two alumni now serve in the U.S. House of Representatives and two serve in the U.S. Senate.

The 2008 Western Legislative Academy will take place November 17-20. Applications are due March 3 and may be found at www.csgwest.org or call 916-553-4423 for more information.
Profile of the 2006 WLA Class President: Idaho Representative Rich Wills

When Rich Wills retired from the Idaho state police, both parties asked him to run for the legislature—an auspicious beginning for any politician. Wills was elected in 2002 to the Idaho House of Representatives where he serves today.

What makes this policeman-turned-legislator stand out above the crowd? Colleagues call him a team player and a consensus builder. Wills says his career with the state police helped prepare him for his job in the legislature. He learned not to personalize issues, something that comes in very handy as a lawmaker. And he taught communications—a valuable skill in any legislator’s toolbox.

Wills also became a ventriloquist during his career in law enforcement and taught safety education through humor. Asked if there’s a place for humor in the legislature, Wills replied, “Big time—so long as it’s not at someone else’s expense.” When he introduced his first bill on the floor of the Idaho House, he brought along his dummy “Crash” to help him. Wills says that humor can de-escalate a situation in the legislative arena just as it does in law enforcement.

His biggest surprise as a freshman was that making an impact takes time. Now, with two terms under his belt, the Idaho lawmaker offered a bit of advice to the newcomers coming behind him. You have to work with others and learn how to give in order to receive. “It’s all about collaboration,” said Wills. His personal mantra is: “Make promises sparingly, but keep them faithfully.”

What does Idaho lawmaker do when he’s not at the state capitol? Plenty. In fact, Wills could be the poster child for the citizen legislator. Home is Glenns Ferry, Idaho—population 1400 located 70 miles east of Boise. Wills and his wife operate a dinner theater where they serve up melodramas and murder mysteries on summer nights. He does the outside cooking and the directing, his wife Connie handles the finances and family members pitch in wherever needed.

Wills now works as an on-call deputy for two Idaho counties. He also teaches communications and de-escalation techniques to city, county, state and federal officials. In his spare time, Wills is a proud father and grandfather and enjoys fishing and hunting.

In 2006, the Idaho representative was chosen to attend the CSG-WEST Western Legislative Academy, where his classmates elected him president. Wills summarized what the Academy experience meant to him in just a few words. “Nobody knew whether you were a D or R. We became a team with one purpose—to become better legislators,” he said.

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

Special appreciation to the El Pomar Foundation and Penrose House that have become integral and invaluable to the CSG-WEST Western Legislative Academy. The Foundation’s continued investment in the WLA helps newer western legislators acquire the skills and networks to be more effective in public policy decisions. The campus environment created by the Penrose House and grounds contributes enormously to the overall success of the program. El Pomar Fellows serve as observers and analysts of the WLA evaluation process and are an unbiased resource for course corrections in the curriculum.
WLA Class of 2007

November 5-8, 2007 in Colorado Springs, Colorado

First Row (left to right): David Bobzien (Asmbr NV), Lynda Moss (Sen MT), Sherry Appleton (Rep WA), Tony Mendoza (Asmbr CA), Mele Carroll (Rep HI), Lisa Shepperson (Rep WY), Bill Nooney (Rep MT), John T.L. Grubesic (Sen NM), Kathy Davison (Rep WY), Jimmie Hall (Rep NM), Claire Levy (Rep CO)

Second Row (left to right): Lori Millin (Rep WY), Arnie Robian (Rep OR), Paul Neuenschwander (Rep UT), Bill Killen (Rep ID), Ron Maurer (Rep OR), Ken Peterson (Rep MT), Joyce Broadsworth (Sen ID), Adam Driggs (Rep AZ)

Third Row (left to right): Russ Fulcher (Sen ID), Jonathon Paton (Rep AZ), Jennifer Seelig (Rep UT), Paula Aboud (Sen AZ), Mark Neuman (Rep AK), Jill Tokuda (Sen HI)

Fourth Row (left to right): Larry Sequest (Rep WA), Clarence Nishihara (Sen HI), Sylvia Andersen (Rep UT), Thomas Garcia (Rep NM), Marv Hagedorn (Rep ID), Jean Cowan (Rep OR)

Fifth Row (left to right): Pat Sullivan (Rep WA), Tom McGilvray (Rep MT), Ellen Roberts (Rep CO), James Settlemeyer (Asmbr NV), Ray Peterson (Sen WY), Anthony Adams (Asmbr CA), Jeff Morris (Rep WA) - CSG-WEST Chair

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CSG-WEST Western Legislative Academy • Winter 2008
Nevada Assembly Member Heidi Gansert, 2005 WLA class president, returned to Colorado Springs to welcome the Class of 2006.

Communications expert Arch Lustberg used humor and on-camera video taping to help lawmakers deliver better speeches and media interviews.

Colorado Senator (and 2006 CSG-WEST chair) Ron Teck kept WL'Aers on time and on target throughout their Academy experience.

FranklinCovey trainer Laurie Julian worked with lawmakers on the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People."

Former New Mexico Speaker Raymond Sanchez (top) and former Oregon Speaker Larry Campbell spoke to lawmakers about the do's and don'ts of effective legislators.

Rutgers University Professor Alan Rosenthal, a national authority on state legislatures, discussed what makes a good legislature.
Academy Faculty

Ethicist taught tough-love ethics using real-life case studies.

Denver NBC political reporter Adam Schrager worked with legislators on “Hollywood Heartache,” a case study in media relations.

Boise State University Professor and scholar Gary Moncrief taught lawmakers about the history of state legislative institutions over the past 50 years.

Time management trainer Pam Vaccaro helped lawmakers learn to say “no” without being negative.

Master consensus builder and former Nebraska Senator David Landis taught highly interactive lessons in negotiations.

The Council of State Governments-WEST is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association serving legislators in the 13 Western states. CSG-WEST promotes excellence in state legislatures through regional cooperation and professional development.

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