

# THE WORK AHEAD

Massachusetts Senator Richard Moore assumed the presidency of the National Conference of State Legislatures in July and spoke with State Legislatures about his plans.

**S** **TATE LEGISLATURES:** What are the key elements of the states' agenda in Congress in the coming year?

**SENATOR RICHARD MOORE:** The issue that could have the most far-reaching effect on states and local governments will be the federal deficit and the proposals to reduce it. NCSL needs to offer suggestions and work with the National Commission on Fiscal Stability and Reform so the budget isn't balanced on the backs of state governments.

One of my priorities for NCSL is to work with Congress to update the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995 to give states a greater role in dealing with legislation or executive branch regulations that impose new costs on them.

NCSL needs to play an active role in reauthorization of the transportation and education acts and implementation of health reform and immigration reform. I will work hard for passage of the Main Street Fairness Act, otherwise known as the Streamlined Sales Tax. Most states would benefit from its passage. Without it, states will continue to lose larger amounts of tax revenue each year as Internet purchases continue to increase.

**SL:** How have state-federal relations changed in the last couple of years with the new administration?

**MOORE:** The current administration might lean toward a broader role for the federal government in policy matters. That offers NCSL opportunities and challenges as we work to ensure the state government voice is heard and respected. President Obama is a former state senator, and about half the members of Congress also have prior service in state legislatures. We must continue to remind them that their state legislative experience is one of the reasons they are where they are today. As some of our Texas legislators might say, we need to remind the president and Congress to "dance with them that brung ya."

**SL:** How do you see the importance of NCSL's

role in state-federal relations?

**MOORE:** NCSL's work in Washington over the years has helped return federal funds to states and has reduced the impact of oppressive mandates. This work has resulted in state funding or reduced burden that more than offsets the NCSL dues payments. Our dues are an investment that ensures our voices are heard in the nation's capital.

Frankly, I would like to see more state legislators take an active role in contact-

ing the U.S. senators and House members in their home states when our Washington office sends out an alert. If we work together as state legislators of both parties and all regions in reaching our federal legislators with a clear and consistent message, we can be a very powerful voice inside the beltway.

**SL:** What will your key outreach efforts be in trying to engage more lawmakers and staff in NCSL?



*NCSL President Senator Richard Moore,  
Massachusetts*

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**MOORE:** Our NCSL staff sections developed a program of NCSL Ambassadors to acquaint both new and veteran staff with NCSL's research, technical assistance and services. I'd like to see us build a similar corps among legislators so that there are lawmakers in each chamber who can articulate the NCSL message. That includes promoting state views with federal officials, encouraging sound ethical policies and practices, helping lawmakers gain a deeper understanding of

public policies and improving the transparency of the legislative process. We need to provide more webinars and conference calls for those who can't easily travel, and find the resources to offer more travel scholarships when face-to-face meetings would be a more effective means of sharing ideas on issues and policy solutions.

**SL:** What are some concrete ways NCSL can restore public faith in government?

**MOORE:** Each of us needs to remember that we operate in a fish bowl, and that we are held to higher standards as elected or appointed public officials. Not only do we work collectively, when one of us gets into some kind of legal, moral or ethical trouble, those actions reflect on everyone in public service. We have an excellent Center on Ethics, supported by the NCSL Foundation, which we should all use to strengthen our legislative ethics standards. We must "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk" when it comes to transparency and high ethical standards.

One of the best instruments for restoring the public faith is our America's Legislators Back to School program. It helps students better understand the concepts of representative democracy. Perhaps we need to develop similar materials aimed at the adult population who might also benefit from a better understanding of the principles and techniques of civic engagement and the role of active citizens. Democracy TV is another tool for helping the public understand the work of legislators and legislative bodies. As the traditional media cuts back on coverage of legislative chambers, we need to expand our efforts to help citizens understand the role of legislators in building consensus to address major public issues. NCSL's officers and executive committee are open to suggestions from our full membership as we strive to give all Americans honest, effective state government. ■

 **CHECK OUT** Senator Moore's essay, "Have Faith in NCSL: My Vision for the Future," at [www.ncsl.org/magazine](http://www.ncsl.org/magazine).